# GREEK VERSUS MODERN TRAGEDY

# IN

# EUGENE O'NEILL

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# ABSTRACT

**Greek Versus Modern Tragedy**
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**Supervising Professor: Dra. Bernadete Pasold**

Tragedy in the classical sense has been continuously revised /revived in modern time through its various possibilities and many playwrights have attempted to revise the genre with great success. The American playwright Eugene O'Neill is among those who purposely adapt the classical mode to his modern "tragic" plays, especially in his trilogy **Mourning Becomes Electra** .

The purpose of this dissertation is to characterize "modern tragedy" as represented by Eugene O'Neill through the myth of Electra in his trilogy **Mourning Becomes Electra**. This present work concentrates on the question whether O'Neill, a modern playwright by definition and by time, can be considered a classical tragedian in modern terms.

This dissertation investigates the presence of the characteristics of the Greek tragedy in Eugene O'Neill by showing that he follows the classic conception of tragedy found in Aristotle's **Poetics**. This work also shows that O'Neill adopts the patterns, myths and themes of the Greek theater in his modern tragedies, especially in the studied trilogy:

**Mourning Becomes Electra**. The investigation is undertaken through the comparative study between Greek tragedy as represented by three Greek playwrights: Aschylus' **Oresteia**, Sophocles' **Electra** and Euripides' **Electra** and modern tragedy as exemplified by O'Neill's trilogy **Mourning Becomes Electra**. This dissertation also discusses myth and tragedy according to Aristotle and associates the vast interpretations of myth active in critical literature especially found in Freud, Jung, Lévi- Strauss, Barthes and Nietzsche to Greek tragedy, to the myth of Electra and to O'Neill in particular .

The basic hypothesis of this research is that O'Neill is a modern playwright but with classical characteristics who used the resources of the Greek tragedy by adapting, revising and principally subverting the classical themes and myths to his "revival" of the classic tragedy in his modern tragedy especially found in his trilogy **Mourning Becomes Electra**. This hypothesis is based on O'Neill's personal interviews (quoted in Bogard:394-403 ) where he exposes his intentional "revivals" of the Greek versions of the famous myths. Throughout the development of the thesis I attempt to show the similarities and differences between O'Neill and the Greek playwrights in order to inquire if O'Neill is more similar than different from the Greeks. This dissertation also intends to illuminate O'Neill's work by using the comparative method, since this is basically a dissertation on O'Neill as an example of a modern playwright with classical characteristics and themes.

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**Resumo**

A tragédia no sentido clássico tem sido constantemente revisada e revivida na era moderna através de suas várias possibilidades e muitos teatrólogos têm tentado revisar o gênero com muito sucesso. O teatrólogo Norte-Americano Eugene O'Neill está entre aqueles que intencionalmente adaptam o modo clássico em sua peças "trágicas" modernas, especialmente em sua trilogia **Mourning Becomes Electra** ( O luto se torna Electra ).

Este presente trabalho concentra-se na questão se O'Neill, um teatrólogo moderno por definição e no tempo, pode ser considerado um escritor trágico em tempos modernos.

A dissertação investiga a presença de características da tragédia Grega em O'Neill, mostrando que ele segue o conceito clássico de tragédia encontrado na **Poética** de Aristóteles. Este trabalho também demonstra que O' Neill adota mitos, temas e estruturas do teatro Grego em suas tragédias Modernas, especialmente na trilogia estudada: **Mourning Becomes Electra** . Esta investigação é feita através do estudo comparativo entre a tragédia Grega, representada por três dramaturgos Gregos: Ésquilo com sua tragédia, a trilogia **Oresteia**, Sofócles com **Electra** e Euripides com **Electra**, e a tragédia moderna representada pela trilogia de O'Neill: **Mourning Becomes Electra**. Esta dissertação também discute mito e tragédia de acordo com Aristóteles e associa as vastas interpretações de mito presentes na literatura crítica, especialmente encontrada em Freud, Jung, Lévi- Strauss, Barthes e Nietzsche, à tragédia Grega, ao mito de Electra e a O'Neill em particular.

A hipótese básica desta pesquisa é que O'Neill é um teatrólogo moderno mas com características "clássicas" na sua obra trágica e que usou os recursos da tragédia Grega

através da adaptação, revisão e principalmente "subversão" dos temas e mitos clássicos em seu "revival" da tragédia Grega na sua tragédia moderna especialmente em **Mourning Becomes Electra**. A hipótese é baseada em entrevistas pessoais de O'Neill (citadas em Bogard: 394 - 403 ) onde ele fala de suas "revivals" (recriações) intencionais das versões Gregas dos mitos famosos. No desenvolvimento da tese nós tentamos mostrar as semelhanças e diferenças entre O'Neill e os Gregos. Este trabalho também pretende iluminar a obra de O'Neill através do uso do método comparativo, desde que esta é basicamente uma dissertação em O'Neill como exemplo de teatrólogo moderno com características e temas clássicos.

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**Résumé**

La tragédie dans le sens classique continue d'être révisé et renouvelée à l'époque moderne par ses différentes possibilités et beaucoup de dramaturges ont réussi à actualiser le genre. Le dramaturge américain Eugene O'Neill est l'un de ceux qui ont intentionellement adapté le mode classique dans ses tragédies. C'ést le cas de la trilogie **Mourning Becomes Electra** .

Ce travail relève de la question suivante: O'Neill, un dramaturge moderne avant tout, pourrait-il être défini comme un écrivain tragique moderne?

La dissertation essaie de repérer les caractéristiques de la tragédie grecque chez O'Neill et au même temps montrer qui 'il suit le concept classique de tragédie présent dans la **Poétique** d'Aristote. Cette dissertation montre aussi qu 'O'Neill se sert de mythes, thèmes et structures du théâtre Grec pour écrire ses tragédies modernes, surtout dans notre object d'étude, la trilogie **Mourning Becomes Electra** .

Le travail fait une analyse comparative entre la tragédie grecque et la tragédie moderne. La première est representée par Eschyle: - **Oresteia** -; l' **Électre** de Sophocle et l'**Électre** d' Euripide. La seconde, par la trilogie d'O'Neill **Mourning Becomes Electra**.

Cette dissertation en même temps qu'elle discute le mythe et la tragédie selon Aristote, elle présente les différentes interprétations du mythe trouvées dans la critique littéraire, chez Freud, Jung, Lévi - Strauss, Barthes et Nietzsche, et les met en rapport avec le mythe d'Électre et avec O'Neill particulièrement .

L'hypothèse qui soutient cette enquête est le fait d'être O'Neill un dramaturge moderne aux caractéristiques classiques qui a utilisé dans son oeuvre tragique les

resources de la tragédie grecque par l 'adaptation de quelques thèmes et mythes classiques lors de son renouveau de la tragédie grecque si bien representé par **Mourning Becomes Electra**. L' hypothèse est basée sur les interviews personnelles d 'O Neill (citées par Bogard: 394-403 ) où il parle de ses renouvellements des versions grecques de mythes fameux.

Dans le développment de la thèse on a essayé de montrer les vraisemblances et les différences entre les grecs. Ce travail a aussi l 'intention d 'éclairer l'oeuvre d'O'Neill par l'emploi de la méthode comparative, une fois qu'elle est surtout une dissertation sur O'Neill comme exemple de dramaturge moderne aux caractéristiques et thèmes classiques.

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# GREEK VERSUS MODERN TRAGEDY
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# Greek Versus Modern Tragedy in Eugene O'Neill

## Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to characterize "Modern Tragedy" as represented by Eugene O' Neill through the myth of Electra in his trilogy **Mourning Becomes Electra**.

Tragedy in the classical sense has been continuously revised/ revived in modern times through its various possibilities and many playwrights have attempted to revise the genre with great success.

The question to be asked about these revivals is to what measure these modern tragedies can be considered tragedies, what important characteristics they bring that establish the limits of what is classic and what is modern in modern tragedy.

This work concentrates on the question as to whether this specific modern play by O'Neill may be considered a tragedy in the classical sense, especially according to Aristotle's **Poetics**.

Within the context of classical versus modern tragedy, the American playwright Eugene O' Neill is among those who purposely adapt the classical mode to the modern "tragic" plays. Like the ancient Greeks, O' Neill also blames cosmic antagonistic forces of the universe for the tragic action which occurs in his plays. He revives the Greek myths of Electra, Oedipus, Phaedra, Hippolytus and the god Bacchus ( Dionysus ), especially in his plays **Mourning Becomes Electra**, **Desire Under The Elms** and **Long Day's Journey Into Night**.

The problem to be analyzed in this dissertation is whether Eugene O' Neill, a modern playwright by definition and by time, can be considered a classical tragedian in modern terms . This will be undertaken through the comparative study between ancient / Greek tragedy and modern tragedy represented by Eugene O' Neill. This dissertation also attempts to discuss the vast interpretations of myth already active in critical literature in relation to the myth of Electra, to Greek tragedy and to O' Neill in particular. Another work to be analyzed here in order to justify the debate on Greek versus modern tragedy is Aristotle's **Poetics** as it is the key to any study of the tragic genre.

Thus, based upon the various approaches to myth and on Aristotle's **Poetics** (especially in his definition and characteristics of tragedy ), this dissertation attempts to analyze the classical plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides in relation to the myth of Electra - Aeschylus' **Oresteia**, Sophocles' **Electra**, Euripides' **Electra** and one modern version of the myth of Electra, the American trilogy **Mourning Becomes Electra** by O'Neill . This modern tragedy will be compared and contrasted to those of the Greek playwrights, observing the modern and classical characteristics of O' Neill's tragedy, as well as its similarities and differences in relation to the Greek plays, especially in relation to Aristotle's characteristics of tragedy ( Plot/ Action, Structure, Thought and Setting ). The Greek and the Modern forms of tragedy ( characterized especially by O' Neill) will be compared by bearing in mind the historical, social, political and cultural backgrounds and contexts of each epoch.

The tentative hypothesis of the present dissertation is that O' Neill is a modern playwright with classical characteristics, having written intentional revivals of the Greek versions of the famous ancient myths, and his intention can be verified through his

interviews and work diary found in **The Unknown O' Neill** (Bogard : 394-403 ).

One important evidence of O' Neill's revision of Greek Tragedy is found in his work diary ( from Spring 1926 until September 1931), **where he** kept a record of his creation and writing of **Mourning Becomes Electra**. This evidence can be noticed in some passages from his diary, such as the following: " Spring 1926 - ***Mourning Becomes Electra*** is a psychological drama using one of the old legend plots of Greek tragedy for its basic theme... Is it possible to get modern psychological approximation of the Greek sense of fate into such a play, which an intelligent audience of today, possessed of no belief in gods or supernatural retribution could accept and be moved by ?" ( O' Neill , in Bogard : 394 )

The theoretical background related to myths in the analysis of both classical and modern (O' Neill's) tragedies is one of the important supports of this dissertation. The different approaches existent in the literature on myth ( especially those of Freud, Jung, and Nietzsche ) will be of great help in understanding the present work. Freud's and Jung's conceptions of myth are derived from the classical tragedies and are present in O' Neill's. Freud based his theory of the Oedipus complex on the ancient myth of Oedipus. O' Neill's **Mourning Becomes Electra** is considered Freudian by various critics (Gordenstein, for example), especially in his characters' portrayal. His Electra (Lavinia) is an anguished woman tortured by her great love and dedication to her father and engaged in an eternal effort to revenge her beloved father's murder. Jung created his theory of the Electra complex based on the Greek myth, and he is present in O'Neill's play with his Electra complex and his notions of myths and archetypes which are present in the curse (the *Guénos* ) of the representative families ( either in the Tieste-Atreus clan of the Greek

tragedies or in the Mannon family in O' Neill's tragedy ). Lévi- Strauss is also important to the subject of this dissertation especially in his view of myth. He says that myth has a tendency to duplicate, triplicate and so on. According to him, the function of repetition is to render the structure of myth apparent. He says that the constant telling and retelling of myth in diverse cultural versions is never quite complete. That is the reason that myth is always being revised and retold throughout times, especially in literature, as O'Neill has done with the myth of Electra. Barthes, in his article on Greek tragedy ( **The Obvious and the Obtuse** ), questions the absolute truth and the total answers provided by the ancient myths of the theatre of the fifth century (Barthes:65 ). In terms of structure , Barthes views the Greek tragedy as having a very organized structure with synthesis and coherence of different dramatic codes (Barthes: 62 ). Barthes believes that one receives from Greek theater not only a structural truth but also a complete signification of the Greek age and thought. O' Neill's plays are well structured and possess different dramatic codes which are, however, coherent with one another. O'Neill is very much concerned with perfection and his plays show his care in relation to this fact. In his work diary when writing **Mourning Becomes Electra** ( qtd in Bogard: 194), O'Neill demonstrates step by step his attempt to write a coherent "Greek" play. There are other important works by Barthes which are also relevant to my work: **Mythologies, The Pleasure of the text** and **Elements of Semiology**. O' Neill also illustrates Nietzsche's thought in his tragedies, since Nietzsche considers tragedy and the hero's salvation either as the refusal or the acceptance of order ( Apollo ) or disorder ( Dionysus ) of the world around and within him. Nietzsche also based his theory of tragedy ( to be found in his work **The Birth of Tragedy** ) on the ancient myths and gods of Greece. The application of these approaches

in the analysis of the plays selected for this study will facilitate the intended comparison and contrast between O' Neill and the Greek tragedies.

Throughout the development of the dissertation I will attempt to show the similarities and differences between O' Neill and the Greek playwrights in order to inquire if O' Neill is more similar to or different from the ancient playwrights. This dissertation also intends to illuminate O' Neill's work by using the comparative method, since this is basically a dissertation on O' Neill as an example of a modern playwright with classical characteristics and themes.

In order to demonstrate that O'Neill's trilogy **Mourning Becomes Electra** is in fact a tragedy and that the playwright adopts the classical mode in his "revival" of the myth of Electra, I have divided this dissertation into two parts. Part I discusses the theoretical background of this present work and is composed of two chapters, one related to myth in general, and to Greek mythology, in particular ( with emphasis on those myths related to the plays chosen for this study ), as well as the various critical approaches to Myth. The second chapter is related to the genre of tragedy and to Aristotle's **Poetics**. Part II of the dissertation consists of a reflective analysis in which the theories of myth ( especially the notion of the Electra myth ) and tragedy as defined in Aristotle's **Poetics** can be applied to the analysis of the Greek versions of the Electra myth as well as to O'Neill's version. The dissertation concludes by pointing out the similarities and differences between Greek and modern tragedy in an attempt to redefine the latter as represented by O'Neill through his "revival" of the Electra myth in the classical mode.

## Part 1- Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece

### 1 - Greek Mythology

In order to analyze O'Neill's Greek trilogy **Mourning Becomes Electra** in the light of the Greek myths, it is necessary to define myth and to explain those Greek myths which are specifically related to the play in question.

One can notice in O 'Neill 's plays, especially in **Mourning Becomes Electra**, the author's deep knowledge of the Greek myths as well as his intentional use of them in some of his plays. In the trilogy which we will be focussing upon, O' Neill purposely revives the myth of Electra by using Aeschylus' **Oresteia**, Sophocles' **Electra** and Euripides' **Electra** and **Orestes** as mythic/ symbolic thematic references.

Raymond Williams in his work: **Drama from Ibsen to Brecht** has a chapter on "**Plays and Myths**" (220:229) in which he gives examples of modern versions of the Greek myths found in O' Neill, Giraudoux, Sartre and Anouilh. He states that "myth meant many things from *plot*, *tale* to *fable* and in modern usage the meaning has specialized in a *false representation of reality* but also a representation of a different kind of reality" (Williams:220). Williams thinks that the myth used in modern tragedy can never be entirely faithful to its ancient use because, even if a known or traditional action is used to express a particular and distanced dramatic form, a "structure of feeling" that has been cut free from contemporary detail, yet it still expresses contemporary experience . But where the definition of myth as a word is in question, the simplest reference is to the

continuity and reworking of the dramatic tradition which led to the writing of many plays in which the stories of Greek drama are used again and again as a form of contemporary expression.

In my opinion O' Neill has followed this tradition by reviving and reworking the dramatic tradition into a form of contemporary expression by using the resources of psychology, theatrical masks and expressionism. With his revival of the myth of Electra in his "modern" trilogy ( comparable to Aeschylus' trilogy, **Oresteia** ), he proved not only the theatrical possibilities of myth but also used a known traditional action ( The Electra myth ) in order to express contemporary experience.

Myth will always reveal a contemporary feeling especially due to its distancing and its inevitability, i.c. ( "the inevitable struggle of those who say "yes" and those who say "no" to an order or system of life" - Wliiams:229) . The use of myth enables the playwright to remain distant/detached while exploring the characters'personalities in the "name-given action"or myth ( "myth imitates action" according to Aristotle's **Poetics** ). The modern/ contemporary playwrights ( especially O'Neill ) have tried to do just that. In the contemporary revival of myth, one finds not a contemporary action expanded into myth , but rather a new way of defining contemporary expression, and a range of attitudes related to that expression, presented in precise dramatic form-It is only through the theater that myth is at once possible and "intolerable" ( Williams: 220- 228 ).

In order to understand myth and its various possibilities of application to modern drama, one must turn to its definition, its history, characteristics and its religion. It is also necessary to realize its importance in the ancient world and to view modern approaches and studies about myth in order to provide a better understanding of its place in the

ancient as well as in the modern world.

In an attempt to define myth, one could say that myths are a kind of imaginative precursor of scientific investigations, a kind of primitive philosophy. Myth is present since the appearance of human kind, and has always been part of each man's experience of life. Primitive man often looked to the sunrise as a symbolic representation of how the world began. The sun became the symbol of light, of knowledge. Heroes were created to undergo certain ordeals, to overcome the forces of darkness which threatened to destroy the light of consciousness. In antiquity, the Greeks believed that Apollo was the god of light, who had triumphed over the god of darkness, Dionysus. These myths became the narration of humanity 's struggle to move from birth to death, to rebirth in order to demonstrate the movement from ignorance to knowledge.

For the Greeks, the word *Mythos* meant a tale or something one uttered, in a wide range of senses: a statement, a story, the plot of a play. The term *Mythologia* meant no more than the telling of stories. Kirk says in his text, **Myth, its Meaning and Function in Ancient and other Cultures** (1-27), that there is not a correct definition of Myth. Myths differ enormously in types of narration and in their social function (Kirk: 7).

However they have certain purposes and functions. Some important ones are as following: to give human beings a perspective of life and death; to give meaning and direction to life experience; to signalize what forces influence and direct our actions; to hold the mirror up to nature and see what images are reflected; to view the evolution of the human mind; to name and to express the inexpressible; to help human beings to go beyond their illusions; to understand how "inner" experiences have been interpreted; to balance the contradiction between life and death; to bring experience from the realm of

possibility into the world of actuality and to provide us with a means of expressing our common joys and woes ( Cafferata: 11 )

In a society in which magic plays a prominent role, it will naturally be part of many myths; it will also be often associated with ritual ( for the fashionable idea that magic is necessarily individual and not social is fallacious (Kirk: 23); yet the consequent convergence of myth and ritual is, in such an instance, almost accidental. E.R. Leach (**Political System of Highland Burme**) has asserted that "myth in my [ his ] terminology is the counterpart of ritual; myth implies ritual, they are one and the same, myth regarded as a statement in word says the same thing as ritual which is considered as a statement in action and so ritual action and belief are alike to be understood as forms of symbolic statement about the social order" ( qtd in Kirk: 23). Later Durkeheim and Jane Harrison viewed myth as the Greek word *legomen* i. e, the thing said, and ritual as *dipmenon*, i.e. the thing performed. Another earlier and more elaborate statement of this doctrine occurs in a much cited article by Kluckholn, "**Myths and Rituals: A General Theory**" (Kirk:23-24)) in which he rejects the idea that myth is derived from ritual and vice versa, but concludes that the two are, nevertheless, closely and essentially associated, even if each can appear independently of the other. Myth exists on the conceptual level and the ritual on the level of action.

Malinowski and two of his follwers, Rin and A. H. Berndt ( in Kirk: 13-23), define Myth as a sacred or religious story and classify every other kind of tale as something different, as "oral literature". They identify only two modern applications of the word "myth, first as a "narrative,or story, or series of songs which is of religious significance, a sacred story, and second as a false belief." Kirk asserts that " the truth is

that modern popular usage, for what it is worth, does not restrict myth to sacred stories at all. Ancient Greek myths, for example, and they are usually the conscious or unconscious examples, often have non-sacred subjects, tales for amusement, but probably possess as much significance as many of those classed as sacred and discussed under the heading of Mythology." (Kirk:23) Myth may be compared to ritual as ritual is an ambiguous term, but to that kind of ritual which implies a closely controlled set of actions performed in an established sequence for a specific supernatural end. Kirk thinks that there is neither logic nor virtue in trying to confine the term "myth" to tales associated in some ways with sacred rituals.

Myths have more than a kind of mechanical or incidental connection with religion. Cassirer (cited in Kirk:30 ) wrote as follows: "In the development of human culture we cannot fix a point where myth ends or religion begins. In the whole course of its history, religion remains indissolubly connected and penetrated with mythical elements. On the other hand, even in its crudest and most rudimentary forms, myth contains some motives that in a sense anticipate the higher and later religious ideals. Myth is from its very beginning potential religion" ( qtd in Kirk:34). Kirk sees one point in Cassirer's association of myth with religion that deserves fuller investigation: the assumption that both involve a passionate response to the world, that they are united by a special intensity of feeling.

Kirk's impression gained from anthropological reports, is that some myths are delivered in a state of high excitement, others are not. Some myths are concerned with subjects that arouse strong emotions, like death and disaster or paradise and good fortune; others, less obviously concerned with emotive issues, tend to be less emotional in their expression.

To religion, on the other hand, intensity of feeling might be granted as an essential property that feeling which occurs in the presence of the divine, the supernatural, the *mysterium tremendum*. In short, myths are not connected with religion by a universal emotional intensity any more than they are by their subject matter, for, as has been seen, whereas some myths have to do with the gods, others do not. Kirk rejects the idea that myth and religion are twin aspects of the same subject, or parallel manifestations of the same psychic condition, just as firmly as he rejects the idea that all myths are associated with rituals.

In order to see the difference and / or similarity between myth and folktales, one should pursue an inquiry into the nature of myths. It may be helpful to draw a preliminary distinction between myth and folktale.

First of all, we must turn to the Greeks in order to perceive this difference. In the Greek myths one can see the difference between legend and myth undisturbed by any terminological confusion, since Greek, far from having too many words to describe different kinds of tale, has too few.

The gods of Homer, for example, belong to myths; they certainly do not belong to the essence of legend or saga which is always in some sense rooted in actuality. Thus, in **The Iliad**, they represent the metaphysical aspect of a primarily legendary narrative. The idea of gods who determine human events and who produce heroic progeny, such as Achilles, was doubtlessly deeply rooted in the Greek narrative tradition.

Any traditional tale is likely to present some kind of mixture of actuality and fantasy. Even a "sacred" myth in Hesiod's **Theogony**, which narrates the story of the birth and development of a god, will, certainly contain some elements drawn from real life, but

it is still legitimate and useful to distinguish between elements and tales that are primarily actual and those that are primarily fantastic. Critics often ask if Helen, Paris, Priam, Hector and Achilles, Agamemnon, Diomeis, Odysseus are part of Greek mythology. Most of these characters are involved in events which, although ostensibly controlled by the gods and goddesses are in essence human, and take place in human environments. Moreover they have few of those special qualities associated with the word "myth" outside the context of Greek mythology. Even the gods, one might argue, are presented with as little fantasy as possible; they are supermen and superwomen gifted with special powers of instant travel and remote operation as well as an extra dimension of action and a dramatic source of motivation. According to this view, **The Iliad** and the **Odyssey** may be classed as legends rather than myths. On the other hand, it would be wrong to treat the Homeric poems only as legends, and thus exclude them from the consideration of the myth as a whole.

Many human episodes ( as implied by these poems ) have acquired archetypal mythical status, largely because of the special texture impressed upon legend by the presence of the gods in episodes like the rape of Helen, the choice of Achilles, his friendship with Patroclus, the death and mutilation of Hector, the impending ruin of Troy, the return and vengeance of Odysseus, the endurance of Penelope and Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon. These incidents have become universal paradigms in subsequent thought and literature. They receive the label of myth simply because each was primarily a human and realistically possible event.

The above mentioned events have been given poetic and symbolic value, not so much by Homer as by Aeschylus, and later by Sophocles and Euripides. They have been

transformed into myths by a secondary process of **development** which consists in transforming a realistic event into a fantastic or supernatural story. Such episodes thus acquire, in the course of tradition, those overtones of fantasy that many other myths possess inherently by virtue of the subject matter itself or the essential involvement of supernatural powers. The Homeric example shows very clearly that legend and myth cannot always be separated in practice, even if entirely non- fantastic and historicizing legends are theoretically possible.

Apart from the Greek myths, myth and folktale are intimately related since both possess aspects and expressions of a particular, primitive folk culture. One preliminary difficulty for separating them is that there is no greater agreement as to the nature of folktales than to the nature of myths. Ruth Benedict belongs to that school of thought which denies any clear distinction between myth and folktales (**Myth- The Enciclopaedia of Social Sciences XI**, 1933: 179 ). She affirms that "for purposes of study, mythology can never be divorced from folktale" and that "myths are tales of the supernatural world" and also that "a story passes in and out of the religious complex with ease and plots which are told as secular tales over two continents become locally the myths which explain the creation of the people and the origin of customs and may be dramatized in religious ritual."

Benedict 's assumption is derived directly from Franz Boas who says that the passage of a narrative theme from a secular to a religious context is a familiar event and that "myths necessarily concern gods, and are associated, for the most part if not always, with rituals." (Kirk:16)

There is little agreement as to the use of the term *myth.* But it certainly can be regarded as one branch of the folktale. It concerns the world as it was in some past age before present conditions were established. It treats creation and origins, and therefore may be compared with fairy tale. Many divergent theories concerning the nature of myth have been held in the past. All of them contain a grain of truth but none give entire satisfaction.

The characteristics of myth are approached in a various number of ways. The characters, particularly the hero, are specific and family relationships are carefully noted. They are attached to a particular region, although this region may vary according to the place where the myth develops. The action is often complicated and often broken up into loosely related episodes. It does not usually depend on disguises and tricks, but on the unpredictable reactions of individual personalities rather than on types. Indeed, one of the distinguishing characteristics of myth is its free- ranging and often paradoxical fantasy (Kirk: 14 ).

Myths tend to possess an element of "seriousness" in establishing and confirming rights and institutions or exploring and reflecting problems or preoccupations. Their main characters are often superhuman ( gods or semi-divine heroes or animals ) who turn into culture - heroes in the era of human and culture creation. For myths, specific though they may be in their characters and local settings, are usually envisaged as taking place in a timeless past. Certain details of contemporary life may intrude, but they are superficial, unless the myth has been strongly influenced by legend.

The action of the folktale, on the other hand, is assumed to have taken place within a specific historical period of the past, but not the distant primeval past. Such tales

are not specific about a certain period of time or about persons, "once upon a time" implies historical time but not the epoch of creation or the first men of a golden age. There is no distinction between the concepts primarily associated with myths and folktales, no binary categorization of traditional tales is likely to be satisfactory.

Myths often have a serious underlying purpose beyond that of simply telling a story. Folktales, on the other hand, tend to reflect simple social situations; they play on ordinary fears and desires as well as on men's appreciation of simple and ingenious situations. The two overlap and that argues for keeping "myth" and "mythology" as separate terms, both for myths in the more special sense and for folktales ( Kirk: 41).

### 1.1 - Gods and their Myths

In order to understand the nature of myths in general, it is necessary to regard the surviving Greek examples as constituting just one important chapter of a long varied volume called Mythology.

The dogma that all myths are about gods is arguable. Yet those who advocate it question if the stories of Perseus, Medusa, Andromeda, Oedipus, Laius, Iocaste are in fact myths, because they are not about gods, if we consider "about" as meaning "primarily concerned with". Perseus may be directed or protected by Athena, just as the actions of Oedipus are foreseen by an oracle of Apollo , but the second "tale" is essentially about a man moving in a human environment, while the first concerns a hero, who may be something more than a man, but falls short of true divinity.

Many myths embody a belief in the supernatural, and for most cultures that will involve some form of polytheistic religion; but many other stories, which are similar to myths, do not. There are types of myth that are often called either legends and folktales, for example, episodes like that of Paris abducting Helen or Achilles killing Hector; or of a woman who puts off her suitors by a trick; or of another woman ( or her father ) who chooses her husband by means of a contest. The first two of these instances might be called "legends", the second two "folktales" but the truth is that they all come within the range of what most people mean by "myth" and yet seem to have no serious religious component whatever.

If one looks outside Greece, there are many myths of primitive societies that have no known or probable connection with cult and concern beings who, although they may

exist outside historical time and perform fantastic and supernatural actions, are not gods and have nothing to do with religion. They are men, often the first men who establish customs and social practices, and are exemplified by the South American Indian that Lévi-Strauss (to be studied later in this dissertation) has examined, as origin-myths, because in one sense or another they explain the origins of cultural phenomena like cooking or painted pottery, or natural phenomena like animal species and particular star groups. These characters are both human beings and animals who sometimes have strange powers, but there is no reason for associating most of them, either now or in the past, with worship: the true eternal mark of religion.

Some myth scholars have defined myth in a varied number of ways. Cassirer, in his work **Linguagem e Mito** has named two of the most influential figures in the study of myth in the last century: Usener ( **Nomes Divinos** ) and Max Muller ( "**Über die Philosophie der Mythologie**", a chapter in **Introdução à Ciência da Religião Comparada**, 2a edição, Estrasburgo, 1876 ). Usener in his analysis, according to Cassirer, was still very much concerned with Medieval thought which showed a great distance between the relation of language and myth as well as traces of the old methods of the Greek Sophisms. Max Muller, a philologist, was one of the first to use philological analysis, not only as a way of revealing the nature of certain mythic beings but also as a starting point for his general theory of the connection between language and myth. Schiller, in his book **Teoria da Tragédia** (18 - 19) considers that "all Mythology was essentially the theory and history of the gods", and Rademaker says that "Mythology was the equivalent term under which classical scholarship during the 19th century spoke of Greek and Roman religion." In the 20th century, the view persists. Rudolf Otto, the

author of the curiously influential **Das Heilige**[1] (1917 ) regarded myth ( together with magic and the belief in souls) as "the vestibule at the threshold of the real religious feeling, an earliest stirring of the numinous consciousness" whereas Northrop Frye states that "Myth is a story in which some of the chief characters are gods, that being an attempt to state the essential quality of Myth. It is a virtue of classical scholars that they are not so prone to make this kind of generalization, at least in its simplest form, no doubt because the heroes who play so large a part in Greek Myths are obviously not gods" ( Frye: 195).

Myths may be of several kinds. One of the most important, which is widespread but not universal, is the creation myth. Some of the most famous examples of this are found especially in the Babylonian and the Hebrew religion. A well-known instance of this is contained in that strange complex of cosmological and theoretical doctrines which was produced in Greece from about the 6th century B.C. onward and is known collectively as Orphism, from the literary fiction which was commonly attributed to the legendary musician, Orpheus. Another widespread form of myth deals with the love affairs and marriages of gods and goddesses, especially found in Greek Mythology.[2]

For the Ancient Greek, religion and mythology were entirely intertwined. Greek religion is perhaps best known through the myths of the gods in Homer and other classical literature. The gods of the classical Greek pantheon were human in form and had distinctive personalities. Many are known more familiarly by the names of their later Roman counterparts-for example, Zeus as Jupiter, Ares as Mars and Aphrodite as Venus.

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[1]Otto's Rank's **The Idea of the Holy** (English translation , London and New York, 1950)- reference in Kirk.

[2] The source for the explanation of the Greek Myths is found in Robert Graves' **The Greek Myths**.

Most of the gods were of foreign origin, having been adopted by the Greeks from the peoples and cultures they had conquered. The subject of Greek religion covers a time span of about 2.000 years from its origins outside Greece to the merger of Greek thought with Christianity. Little is certain about the first Greek settlers except that they brought with them gods and men, were highly adaptive and assimilative, incorporating elements from the religious beliefs of the aboriginal inhabitants of the Greek Peninsula as well as from the Minoan Civilization ( Minoan Period in Crete: approximately 2.400 to 1.500 B.C, Pre-Greek cults). The principal deity in the Minoan religion was a goddess associated with wild animals or snakes or the earth's fertility and with childbirth. These may be different aspects of a single goddess or possible separate deities. Analogy with Asian cults suggests a single mother goddess who has different titles. She has a younger consort who might appropriately be called the master of animals.

Cult objects, like the ax, are prominent in Minoan religion which was primarily concerned with Nature. The chthonic aspect ( *chthon* means earth, chthonic is then related to earth, earthly) was not very prominent, except insofar as the great goddess was thought of as mother Earth. Minoans may have believed in life after death as they buried their dead ( often in large jars within the house ) and offered them libations.

Minoan motifs reappear in the Mycenean religion ( Mycenean Period: 1.600 to 1.200 B.C.). The cult objects are the same and in both there is the absence of large temples. Myceneans were led to religious changes. The tendency toward anthropomorphism is increased and Mycenaen divinities already have distinct names and functions. Homeric gods named in Mycenean texts include Zeus, Artemis, Athena, Demeter, Paen (one of Apollo's titles), Hera, Hermes and Dionysus. Thus the Olympian

deities existed in pre-Homeric Greece. Artemis in Homer is the mistress of animals; she thus shows a continuous line of development from the Minoan goddesses. Demeter similarly goes back to the Cretan snake-goddesses, she is the forerunner of the Homeric Athena, who lived in the Acropolis with her sacred snake, bird, shield and tree (Frye:194).

In general, Mycenaen divinities are individualized, developing away from the vaguely defined but anthropomorphic Minoan deities toward the strongly personalized Homeric gods. The Mycenaens buried their dead ( the princes in magnificent tombs ) with goods and utensils, evidence at least for belief in survival after death.

The Homeric gods are fully anthropomorphic with clearly defined personalities, dwelling as a family upon Olympus. Although subject to human passions and failings, they are immortal and have superhuman powers. Their society and manners are those of the Mycenean aristocracy, their moral code reflects the ideals of aristocratic chivalry in which justice and honor are prominent. Their relation with men is on the whole rational, as between a greater order of beings and a lesser. They may be propitiated or persuaded by sacrifices and oaths, and they may show favor to individual men and intervene in human affairs. Their control of events is ill defined, for a man has his *fate*- ("Moira" or "allotted position") beyond which even a god cannot take him. Even Zeus could not save his son Sarpedon from death.

Prominent in Greek religion was hero worship, with a cult at the tomb of a dead leader. Ancestor worship was doubtlessly practiced among the early Greeks and the royal tombs at Mycenae are proof of a belief in the continued existence of the dead princes. In the Homeric poems, the invocation of the soul of the prophet Tiresias (**Odyssey** Book 11, lines 23-50 ) and the funeral rites for the warrior Patroclus ( **Iliad**, Book 23, lines 1-25)

show that this belief continued to exist. The poems provided names for many heroes who were worshipped in earlier times. Typically, the worshipped hero was once a mortal. He had power to help or harm living men and was usually attached to a particular location, dwelling in his tomb. If he had been buried abroad and it proved necessary to invoke him, his bones had to be brought back. The Thebans attempted to recover the bones of Oedipus, and in historical times the Athenians brought back the bones of Theseus from Scyros. Since the same gods were worshipped by many communities, the local hero gave a city the protection it needed in war and other undertakings. The practice of hero worship was important in the age of the autonomous city- state; overseas the founder of a colony might become its hero. Beliefs about a hero's powers are portrayed in Sophocles in the tragic drama **Electra** in which Clytemnestra, with guilty conscience for having murdered her husband Agamemnon, has a dream where she sees her husband planting the royal scepter in the Palace and from this scepter emerges a vigorous offspring capable of covering all of the Mycenae land.

In Homer, Zeus presides over an established order. The early myths of Cosmogony and Theogony tell us of the previous state of affairs. The earliest surviving document of Greek literature is Hesiod's **Theogony**, which is devoted mainly to mythological topics and has occupied the most prominent position in many accounts of Greek myths thus giving a strong religious tone to mythology as a whole. Hesiod's Theogony ( c.750 B.C.) is closer to popular beliefs than Homer's . In the beginning, says Hesiod, the void ( chaos ) came into being and from it came Darkness, Night and Light. From it, too, came Earth, who was brought from Heaven and sea. Earth (Gae) and Heaven (Uranus) bore many creatures, including the hundred armed giants and the Titans, of

whom twelve are named.The youngest Titan, Cronus became the most powerful deity, while from his severed genitals sprang giants, furies, nymphs of the goddess, Aphrodite. From Cronus and his sister, Rhea, came six of the Olympian gods, Zeus being the youngest. He, in his turn, attacked his father and defeated the Titans to become supreme ruler.

In contrast to Hesiod's system is the Orphic Cosmogony which places emphasis upon Eros (Love) as the prime creative principle. His account of the personification of abstract qualities, crude myths and striking parallels with Hitite and Babylonian mythologies, systematized a mass of popular beliefs. Orphic doctrine is more philosophical.

Before entering into the exposition of the most important Greek gods found in both Hesiod's Theogony and in the Orphic Cosmogony, we will see what Kirk says about Greek Mythology. He thinks that there are various approaches. One approach, adopted by Kirk, is determined by the need to define its total qualities. It might be described, as a phenomenological approach, one that achieves an understanding of an inner essence by the analytical description of outward appearances. Several kinds of analysis must be applied, and that presents a problem in itself-how to do so without becoming unacceptably tedious in the process.

The old dichotomy between divine and heroic myths has its uses, even if there are still some approaches of Greek mythology that maintain that only tales about the gods are myths, the rest being saga, oral literature or legend. Generally speaking, one segment of Greek mythology is primarily concerned with the gods, another a somewhat larger segment, with heroes. Obviously the two overlap, as when a hero like Odysseus or Jason

is aided or persecuted by a deity such as Athena, or Poseidon or Hera.

The growth and development of the gods is in the general subject of the already mentioned **Theogony** by Hesiod. The poem's particular theme is the successive stages by which Zeus achieved his supremacy; accordingly, it is perfunctory about some of the great Olympic gods, and devotes more attention to figures like Kronos, Hecate, Prometheus and an assortment of giants and monsters, of which the Cyclopes, the giants with a hundred hands, Typhoeus and the descendants of Phorcys are the most prominent. Much of our earliest information about the growth of other gods comes not from Hesiod but from Homer, the Homeric Hymns, Stesichorus, Pindar and other lyric poets and the tragedians. The difference on approaching to the myths in Hesiod's **Theogony** and Homer's Poems lies in the fact that Hesiod's is mainly a philosophical allegory while Homer's writings have as the main argument the Heroic saga (Kirk: 172-174).

The beginning of Hesiod' s divine genealogy is concerned with the primeval entities Ouranos and Gaia (sky and earth), enfolded and then separated by the dark wastes of chaos; and with the multiplication of offspring, whether in the form of local differentiation like Okeanos and Ponto, or more anthropomorphically as the Titans, among them Zeus' parents, Kronus and Rhea. The poem also devotes great attention to the description of the underworld, its various regions and aspects- a sign that the Greeks were deeply concerned with the condition and physical surroundings of the dead. The same interest is visible in Homer, especially in the underworld scene of the 11th **Odyssey**, while Plato's four great eschatological accounts confirm that the elaboration of a detailed and picturesque world of the dead continued as an important element of the mythical tradition.

In what concerns the behavior of the gods, once they have achieved their

permanent functions and status, the earliest and, in some ways, richest sources are the **Iliad** and **Odyssey**, particularly for Zeus himself and the martial, protective deities like Athena, Hera, Apollo and Poseidon, who support one side or the other in the Trojan War, or gods with specialized functions like Hermes and Hephaestus. Yet the elaborate divine setpieces - not the scenes of assembly or discussion but the abortive battle of the gods in the 20th and 21st sections of the **Iliad** or the love-affairs of Ares and Aphrodite in the **8th Odyssey**-appear to be sophisticated developments belonging to the latest stages of the true oral tradition. They are not myths in any strict sense but rather literary inventions that have something in common with the ingenious mythological elaboration of Euripides (Euripides is ingenious not only by his alteration of the official myths but also for conceiving *suis generis* modalities of the poetic "páthos" ). That they occur in Homer should not make us think that they are as "archaic"or "mythopoeic" ( myths in Homer are mainly poetic narrative of the heroic sagas and epics ), as many traditional divine episodes of which we happen to hear for the first time in the second century A. D.; and the same warning applies to many other Homeric deities that can be less clearly identified as bastard mythology than these.

Thus in addition to the cultic, erotic and marital relationships of their everyday life, the gods have a fantastic development against the wider background of nature powers and cosmic differentiation, of the underworld as well as the earth and sky; in spite of the chaotic initial opposition not only of monstruous giants, huge winds, and serpentine prodigies, but also of their own direct ancestors such as the equivocal Kronos.

Because of, or in spite of, the protection of Prometheus, the race of men eventually achieves a stable relationship with the gods, and women, even though

descended from Pandora, begin to win divine favors. The result of such a relationship is the emergence of a second main category of mythical subjects, namely the heroes, men who have a god or goddess as one parent or who, at least, walked the earth when such figures existed. (Source found in Kirk: 170:174).

The word "hero" has both obscurity and ambiguity. Lewis Farnell, [3] whose work on hero cults first appeared in 1921 and still has value, distinguished seven types of heroes: hieratic hero-gods of cult origin like Trophonius or Amphion; sacral heroes or heroines who are associated with a god, perhaps as a priest or priestess, like Iphigenia; secular figures who eventually became fully divinized, such as Heracles, Asclepios and the Discuri; epic heroes like Hector, Achilles and Agamemnon; fiction eponyms and genealogical heroes like Aedes, Ion and Daemon; functional and cultural daemons; and finally a few real men ( that is, men who certainly lived ) who were made heroes after their deaths and given minor cults within a full historical period (Kirk: 6).

Farnell 's division is not ideal; however, as a schematic analysis it can be useful. Neither Perseus nor Oedipus, each the subject of prominent myths, falls into one particular group. They are neither markedly hieratic or sacral figures, nor epic characters like Paris or Diomede, nor in many important respects do they resemble Heracles. They are eminent ancestors in the royal lines of Argos and Thebes, yet more than clan or tribal projections. Still, they have achieved a complete mythological status of their own.

Perseus was propitiated as a hero at Argos and elsewhere, but Oedipus had no cult at Thebes, only in Attica and elsewhere in Boetia, and then probably at no early date.

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[3] FARNELL, L.R. **Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality**. Oxford, 1921 - in **Kirk**.

Possession of a cult became for the Greeks themselves one of the chief marks of a hero. The form of hero worship was distinct from that of a divine cult, as for example in the type of sacrifice. Yet, Aeneas, the son of the goddess Aphrodite, had no early cult, and Menelaus and Agamemnon, whose parents were not only mortal but also rather undistinguishable, had gained cults at least by the time of Homer and probably before. Amphiaraus, admitedly a prophet, acquired an early important cult. The truth seems to be that cultic association and semi-divine ancestry were felt to be more and more important, from the time of Homer and Hesiod on, the hallmark of important heroes, but many were developed as literary forms in the **Iliad** and **Odyssey** and traced their ultimate genesis to a god or goddess. Such heroes would normally have no individual cult, but were nevertheless conceived as belonging to a generation that still enjoyed the protection of the gods and shared, to a varying extent, their supernatural capacities, and, in favoured cases, their very blood. Simple arguments to the effect that all heroes were "faded gods" (a phrase once popular, now obsolete ) or conversely that they were semi-deified men are a waste of time, since the heroes are as heterogenous in their probable origins as in their developed qualities. Heracles himself is the best example of heroic diversity. With that name, a god in origin, he certainly became one in the end. His cults were various and widespread, and relatively early; and yet many of his mythical qualities are thoroughly human, more so than those of any other hero-one thinks of his brutality, his capacity for dishonesty and his voracious appetites of every kind. He is also easily the most conspicuous single figure in the whole range of Greek myths, and reminds us that, whatever the complexities of heroes and their types, it is those who are semi-divine, a few heroes of the great epic-adventures ( *the Seven Against Thebes, The Argonauts, the*

*Trojan war,* ), the princely families of Thebes that dominate the heroic sector.

The others, functional or relatively modern, are unimportant. Even the epic heroes have to be scrutinized for genuine mythical quality, for many of them have been promoted from mere names in the course of the developing tradition, and fulfill roles that are essentially secondary or generic. Even the greatest figures of the **Iliad** and **Odyssey**, like Achilles and Hector, Odysseus and Telemachus, must be cautiously assessed. Most of what they are involved in is better described as legend than myth, in its stricter form. Whatever the ancestry of the Homeric heroes, whatever their prodigious feats, their acquisition of god-given powers and their occasionally privileged fates after death, such fantastic and imaginative qualities as they possess are rubbed off on them by association rather than being theirs in true essence.

Perhaps that is too extreme a statement; yet it is significant that the heroes involved in the myths that seem most typically Greek are not Agamemnon ( he is more a heroic figure than a mythic figure ), Menelaus, Achilles, Diomedes, the Ajaxes, Odysseus and the rest, so much as Pelops, Atreus, Perseus, Cadmus, Oedipus, Jason and of course Heracles-figures whose power depends on their association with simple episodes that nevertheless seize the imagination, rather than with complex and semi- realistic epics that stimulate more intricate reactions. It is curious and revealing that the second group of heroes belong to an ealier heroic generation than the first; their adventures are not restricted by a recent tradition from the Trojan War on, but were probably originated many centuries before.

As for the gods, once they have achieved their form and functions most of them are quite limited in their actions. Among the Olympian gods, Zeus is "father of gods and

men". His functions extend over the whole range of human life and his varied titles indicate his interest in regulating human conduct. His ethical aspect is supremely portrayed in the plays of Aeschylus.

The consort of Zeus is his sister Hera, goddess of marriage and of the life of women. Her development from the Minoan earth goddess is indicated by the sacred marriage described by Homer in the **Iliad** ( Book 14, lines 346-351). In spite of being married to Hera, Zeus is credited in mythology with many other unions, as he pursues various lovers . The impiety of the literary treatment of Zeus, from Homer onward, does not obscure the basic fact of Zeus' supremacy and deity.

Poseidon is the god of the deep sea, and of earthquakes. He produces monstruous progeny and is associated with horses (which were once conceived as monsters ). He is a Greek god in origin, most likely an earthly fertility spirit whose nature changed when the Greeks settled by the sea. Hades however retained his chthonic aspect as god of the underworld. He is negative as lord of the dead and as Pluto ( "wealth" ), the giver of earth's fertility, he appears in a positive aspect. Greek chthonic religion generally has a double concern with the dead and with the fertility of the earth. At this point, it goes without saying, myth and religion overlap.

Of the remaining Olympians, the "ancient" gods-Athene, Artemis and Hermes-can be traced to the Minoan religion, while the "younger" group-Ares, Aphrodite, Hephoestus, Apollo and Dionysus are from the non-Greek north and east ( Graves. **The Greek Myths**, Vol 1: 55 -88) . Athena, originally the Cretan snake goddess, became a Mycenean war goddess. In Homer she dwells in the palace of Erechtheus, king of Athens. As the daughter of Zeus and Metis (wisdom), she sprang from her father 's head. Later her

prime function is as protectress of cities (Athens-Polis). She disputes the control of Athens with Poseidon and wins. She becomes the guardian of the city and its workers. Athena is also goddess of wisdom and the arts. Generally she is a curiously static figure once her remarkable birth has been achieved.

Artemis is the Homeric goddess of wild animals and of hunting. She is another form of the Minoan mistress of animals. In classical mythology she is, like Athena, virgin. The Greeks transformed this ancient but grotesque figure into the "Queen and Huntress, chaste and fair", familiar in late Western art and literature. She was associated with the life of women, especially with children and with the moon.

Apollo is the supremely Hellenic god, associated especially with the Pan-hellenic centers of Delphi and Debs. His non-Greek name and his myths indicate an origin in Asia Minor and (before that ) in Northern Asia. In art he is represented as a young man in his prime, exemplifying ideal manhood, whether in a virile and commanding aspect, as at Olympia (470 B.C. ) or sentimentalized, as in 4th century sculpture. He stands for the Greek ideal of moderation, the motto *mêden agan* ( "nothing in excess") was inscribed on his temple at Delphi. He is patron of the civilized pursuits of music, art, poetry and medicine. As Phoebus ("the shining one"), he is associated with the sun . Apollo had prophetic powers and his oracle at Delphi was consulted by Greek statesmen before major decisions were taken. The ecstatic nature of the prophecies made by his Priestess, the Pythia , shows him in a non-Greek nonrational aspect. His late arrival among the Greeks is further shown by the fact that his was the fourth oracle to possess Delphi. Besides uttering prophecies, he would also purify homicides there, as told in the myth of Orestes. Apollo's interest in the law of homicide is best seeen in Aeschylus' play **The Eumenides.**

Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and love, could never be persuaded to lend the other goddesses her magic girdle which made everyone fall in love with its wearer, for she was jealous of her position. Zeus had given her in marriage to Hephaeseus, the smith-god, but the true father of the three children with whom she presented him-Phobus, Deimus and Harmoine- was Ares ( the god of war ). She also had a son with Hermes-Hermaphrodite, a double sexed being, and with Poseidon. She bore the latter two sons, Rhodes and Herphilus. Zeus decided to humiliate Aphrodite by making her fall desperately in love with a mortal, Andrius, and she bore him a son, Aeneas .

At Hera's orders, the Titans seized Zeus' newly born Dionysus, a horned child crowned with serpents, and, despite his transformations, tore him into shreds. Then they boiled him in a cauldron. Later, on Zeus' instruction, Hermes temporarily transformed him when he grew to manhood and made him mad. His grandmother Rhea later purified him of the many murders he had committed during his madness and initiated him into the mysteries of their women's cult.

One could discuss the roles of the other gods in greater detail, to show that the range of incidents in which they are involved, once they have found their developed form, is surprisingly restricted. This may not be altogether unexpected, although it is an observation full of significance for the assessment of Greek myths as a whole. It certainly emphasizes an important truth, that the mythical power of a deity may depend not so much on what he or she does, as on what he or she is; and that , among the range of things done, generic or day-to-day actions envisaged by cult may be as influential on the minds of men as the famous and exceptional actions envisaged by myth.

## 1.2 -The Hero Myth

The prominence of the heroes in Greek myths is itself a standing refutation of the contention that all myth is primarily concerned with gods, that it is a facet of religion. There are some important myths about some heroes of Greek history that are relevant to the subject of this dissertation ( specifically, the Electra myth ). The myths to be described here are the ones related to the Atreus-Thyestes curse, concerning Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Aegisthus, Orestes, Electra and Iphigeneia. These mythic figures are also historical figures having great importance in the history of the Trojan war.[4]

The dynasty to which Agamemnon, Aegisthus, Electra and Orestes belong was begun by Pelops, son of the Lydian king Tantalus. King Tantalus was the intimate friend of Zeus who admitted him to Olympian banquets of nectar and ambrosia until, good fortune turning his head, he betrayed Zeus'secrets and stole the divine food to share with his mortal friends. Before this crime could be discovered, he committed a worse one. Having called the Olympians to a banquet, Tantalus found that the food in his larder was insufficient for the company and, either to test Zeus' omniscience, or merely to demonstrate his good will, cut up his son Pelops, and added the pieces to the stew prepared for them. Restored to life, a gleaming ivory color made Pelops so beautiful that Poseidon fell in love with him. The god of horses made him a brilliant horseman, so that when he came to Greece, he aspired to the hand of Hippodame, princess of Pisa, who could only be won by the defeat of her dangerous father, Oenomaus, in a chariot-race-a

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[4] The source for the Thyestes - Atreus story and its descendants is found in Robert Graves'**The Greek Myths** . Vol 2 :29-73 .

typical bride-contest motif. Pelops persuaded the king's charioteer Myrtilus to sabotage the chariot; but later he had to kill Myrtilus too, who cursed him and his descendants. It was this curse ( the family "Guenos") that started the trouble between Atreus and Thyestes, Pelops' sons, for Thyestes, out of jealousy seduced Atreus's wife Aerope and Atreus in turn served Thyestes with his own children for dinner. Only Aegisthus escaped for a while; he was Thyestes'son by his own daughter , and carried on the quarrel by seducing Clytemnestra, wife of Atreus' son Agamemnon. The consequences are well known. The theme of curses, seduction and incest is continued when this story makes contact with the Theban cycle, for Pelops' youngest son, Chrysippus, was seduced by Laius, king of Thebes, and Pelops' curse (corresponding in its effects to the curse placed on himself by Myrtillus) led to disaster for Laius and his son Oedipus, then for Oedipus' sons Etocles and Polyneices, who killed each other in the war of **The Seven against Thebes**.

The story of the two brothers Atreus and Thyestes,victims of the family curse, is important for the development of the Electra theme, present in both the Greek tragedians in study in this dissertation and in O'Neill's **Mourning Becomes Electra**, the focus of this work.

The curse on the houses of Atreus and his brother Thyestes is a major theme in Greek literature. After killing their half brother Chrisippus, their father's favorite, Atreus and Thyestes fled to Mycenae. When Eurystheus died, the Mycenean notables chose Atreus as their king, But an oracle advised the Mycenean to choose between the Pelopoid house to rule over them. They there upon summoned Atreus and Thyestes from Midea and

debated which of these two ( who were fated to be always at odds ) should be crowned king.

After a debate at the Council Hall, ( with Zeus involved and who favored Atreus) Atreus became the king and married Aerope . The jealous Thyestes seduced Atreus'wife and was banished by Atreus . Thyestes asked Atreus'son Pleisthenes whom he had raised to kill Atreus . Atreus did not know his own son and killed him.

When Atreus learned that Thyestes had planned his death , he invited his brother to a banquet and served thyestes the flesh of two of his sons . Thyestes cursed Atreus and his descendants and then fled to Sicyon .

Thyestes did not know that he had a son , Aegisthus , by his daughter Pelopia . When Atreus came to Sicyon to seek Thyestes , he met and married Pelopia ( who was pregnant of Thyestes son - Aegisthus ) . Atreus ordered the infant Aegisthus exposed on a mountain . But shepperds rescued him and gave him to a she-goat for suckling - hence - the name Aegisthus - "goat strenght" . Later Aegisthus believed Aegisthus was his own son and recovered Aegisthus from the goatherds and reared him as his heir.

Thyestes was brought back to Mycenae by Atreus sons Agamemnon and Menelaus. Atreus threw Thyestes into prison and ordered Aegisthus only seven years of age to kill him as he slept. Learning frm Pelopia( his own daughter) that he is Aegisthus'father , Thyestes tell him the truth and orders him to kill Atreus. Aegisthus kills Atreus and gives Thyestes the kingdom of Mycenae.

The most important of Atreus' sons, Agamemnon and Menelaus, have strong participation in the War of Troy. Agamemnon became a war hero and Menelaus' importance is in the rape of his wife Helen , a fact which caused the war of Troy. Here

follow some relevant aspects of these two brothers' lives and experiences.

Agamemnon and Menelaus were of an age to arrest Thyestes at Delphi; when Aegisthus killed Atreus , they were still infants, whom their nurse had the presence of mind to rescue them from Thyestes . Snatching them up, one under each arm, she fled with them to Polypheidor, the twenty- fourth king at Sicyon at whose instance they were subsequently entrusted to Oeneus the Aelation. It is agreed however that after they had spent some years at Oeneus' court, king Tyndareus of Sparta restored their fortunes marching against Mycenae, where he exalted an oath from Thyestes, who had taken refuge at the altar of Hera, that he would bequeath the sceptre to Agamemnon as Atreus' heir and go into exile, never to return. Thyestes thereupon departed to Cythera where Aegisthus, fearing Agamemnon's vengeance, fled to king Cylarabes, son of king Sthenelaus the Argive.

Agamemnon first made war against Tantalus, king of Pisa , (son of his ugly uncle Broteus), killed him in battle and forcibly married his widow Clytaemnestra, whom Leda had borne to king Tyndareus of Sparta. The Discuri, Clytaemnestra's brothers, thereupon marched on Mycenae; but Agamemnon had already gone as a suppliant to his benefactor Tyndareus, who forgave him and let him keep Clytaemnestra. After the death of the Discuri, Menelaus married their sister Helen and Tyndareus abdicated in his favor.

Clytaemnestra bore Agamemnon one son-*Orestes*-and three daughters: *Electra*, or Laodice, *Iphigenia* or Iphianassa and *Chrysothemis*, though some say that Iphigenia was Clytaemnestra 's niece, the daughter of Theseus and Helen, on whom she took pity and adopted.

When Paris, the son of king Priam of Troy, abducted Helen and thus provoked the Trojan war, both Agamemnon and Menelaus were absent from home for ten years, but Aegisthus did not join their expeditions, preferring to stay behind at Argos and seek revenge on the House of Atreus.

Nauplius, the husband of Clymene, having failed to obtain requital from Agamemnon and the other Greek leaders for the stoning of his son Palamedes, had sailed away from Troy and coasted around Attica and the Peloponnese, inciting the lonely wives of his enemies to adultery. Aegisthus, therefore, when he heard that Clytemnestra was among those most eager to be convinced by Nauplius, planned not only to become her lover, but to kill Agamemnon with her assistance as soon as the Trojan war ended.

Hermes, sent to Aegisthus by omniscient Zeus, warned him to abandon this project, on the grounds that when Orestes had grown to manhood, he would be bound to avenge his father. For all his eloquence, however, Hermes failed to deter Aegisthus, who went to Mycenae with rich gifts in his hands, but hatred in his heart. At first, Clytaemnestra rejected his advances , because Agamemnon, apprised of Nauplius' visit to Mycenae, had instructed his court bard to keep close watch on her and report to him, in writing, the least sign of infidelity. But Aegisthus seized the old minstrel and left him without food on a lonely island where birds of prey were soon picking his bones. Clytaemnestra then yielded to Aegisthus ' embraces and he celebrated his unhoped-for-success with burnt offerings to Aphrodite, and gifts of tapestries and gold to Artemis, who was nursing a grudge against the House of Atreus.

Clytaemnestra had small cause to love Agamemnom: after killing her former husband Tantalus, and the new-born child at her breast , he had married her by force, and

then gone away to a war which promised never to end. He had also sanctioned the sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis-and this she found even harder to bear, and was said to be bringing back Priam's daughter Cassandra, the prophetess, as his wife in all but name. Cassandra had borne Agamemnon twin sons: Teledamus and Pelops. Clytemnestra's informant about Agamemnon's actions in Troy had been Nauplius' surviving son Oeax who, in vengeance for his brother's death, maliciously provoked her to murder.

Clytaemnestra therefore conspired with Aegisthus to kill both Agamemnon and Cassandra. Fearing, however, that they might arrive unexpectedly, she wrote Agamemnon a letter asking him to light a beacon on Mount Ida when Troy fell: and herself arranged for a chain of fires to relay his signal to Argolis by way of Cape Hermaeum on Lemmos, and the mountains of Athos, Macistus, Messapius, Cithaeron, Aegiplanctus and Arachne. A watchman was also stationed on the roof of the palace at Mycenae: a faithful servant of Agamemnon's , who spent one whole year crouched on his elbows, like a dog, gazing towards Mount Arachne and filled with gloomy forebodings. At last, one dark night, he saw the distant beacon blaze and ran to wake Clytemnestra. She celebrated the news with sacrifice and thanksgiving; though, indeed, she would have liked the siege of Troy to last for ever. Aegisthus thereupon posted one of his own men in a watchtower near the sea, promising him two gold latents for the first news of Agamemnon's landing.

Hera had rescued Agamemnon from the fierce storm which destroyed many of the returning Greek ships and drove Menelaus to Egypt; and, at last, a fair wind carried him to Nauplia. No sooner had he disembarked, than he bent down to kiss the soil, weeping for joy. Meanwhile the watchman hurried to Mycenae to collect his fee, and Aegisthus chose twenty of the boldest warriors, posted them in ambush inside the palace,

ordered a great banquet and then, mounting his chariot, rode down to welcome Agamemnon.

Clytemnestra greeted her travel-worn husband with every appearance of delight, unrolled a purple carpet for him (this scene is well depicted in Aeschylus' play **Agamemnon**, where in an ironic way Agamemnon is greeted with the honors of king and lord of the wife just to be killed soon after) and led him to the bath-house, where slave-girls had prepared a warm bath; but Cassandra remained outside the palace, caught in a prophetic trance, refusing to enter, and crying that she smelt blood, and that the curse of Thyestes was heavy upon the dining-hall. When Agamemnon had washed himself and set one foot out of the bath, eager to partake of the rich banquet now already set on the tables, Clytaemnestra came forward, as if to wrap a towel about him, but instead threw over his head a garment of net woven by herself, without either neck or sleeve-holes. Entangled in this, like a fish, Agamemnon perished at the hands of Aegisthus, who struck him twice with a two-edged sword. He fell back into the silver-sided bath, where Clytaemnestra avenged his wrongs by beheading him with an axe. She then ran out to kill Cassandra with the same weapon, not troubling first to close her husband's eyelids or mouth: but wiped off on his hair the blood which had splashed her, to signify that he had brought about his own death.

A fierce battle was now raged in the palace, between Agamemnon's body guards and Aegisthus 'supporters. Warriors were slain like swine for a rich man's feast, or

lay wounded and groaning beside the laden boards in a welter of blood[5]; but Aegisthus won the day. Outside, Cassandra's head rolled to the ground, and Aegisthus also had the satisfaction of killing her twin sons by Agamemnon; yet he failed to do away with another of Agamemnon's bastards, by name Halesus, or Haliscus. (Graves, Vol 2 :54)

This massacre took place on the thirteenth day of the month Gamelion ( January ) and, unafraid of divine retribution, Clytemnestra decreed the thirteenth day a monthly festival, celebrating it with dancing and offerings of sheep to her guardian deities. Some applauded her resolution; but other people in the region were of the opinion that she had brought eternal disgrace upon all women, even virtuous ones. Aegisthus, too, gave thanks to the goddess who had assisted him .

Orestes was reared by his loving grandparents, Tyndares and Leda, and, as a boy, accompanied Clytemnestra and Iphigenia to Aulis[6]. But some say that Clytemnestra sent him to Phocis, shortly before Agamemnon's return; and others that on the evening of the murder, Orestes, then ten years of age, was rescued by his noble-hearted nurse [7]. His sister Electra, aided by her father's ancient tutor, wrapped him in a robe embroidered with wild beasts, which she herself had woven and smuggled him out of the city.[8]

After hiding for a while among the shepherds of the river Tamis, which divides

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[5] This description is found in Homer's **Odyssey** XI, 400 and 442, (qtd in Graves,Vol 2:55)
[6] This assertion is found in Euripides'**Orestes**:462 and **Iphigenia in Aulis**:622 ( qtd in Graves, Vol 2 :61)
[7] This affirmation is found in Aeschylus'**Agamemnon**:877 , in **Libation Bearers** and in Euripides'**Electra**:14( qtd in Graves , Vol 2:61)
[8] Graves shows that this version appears in Apollodorus' **Epitome** VI :24 ; in Euripides'**Orestes** :542 and in Aeschylus' **Libation Bearers**: 232 ( **The Greek Myths**,Vol 2 : 61)

Argolis from Laconia, the tutor made his way with Orestes to the court of Strophius, a firm ally of the House of Atreus, who ruled over Crisa, at the foot of Mount Parnassus. At Crisa, Orestes found an adventurous playmate, namely Strophius' son, Pylades, who was somewhat younger than himself, and their friendship was destined to become proverbial. From the old tutor he learned with grief that Agamemnon's body had been flung out of the house and hastily buried by Clytaemnestra, without either libation or myrtle-boughs; and that the people of Mycenae had been forbidden to attend the funeral.

Aegisthus reigned at Mycenae for seven years , riding in Agamemnon 's chariot, sitting on his throne, wielding his sceptre, wearing his robes, sleeping in his bed, and squandering his riches. Yet despite all the trappings of kinship, he was little more than a slave to Clytemnestra, the true ruler of Mycenae.Aegisthus lived in abject fear of vengeance, always surrounded by a trusty foreign bodyguard, never passed a single night in sound sleep, and offered a good reward in gold for Orestes' assassination [9].

Though the leading princes of Greece now contended for Electra's hand, Aegisthus feared that she might bear a son to avenge Agamemnon, and therefore announced that no suitor could be accepted. He would gladly have destroyed Electra, who showed him implacable hatred, lest she lay secretly with one of the Palace officers and bear him a bastard; but Clytemnestra, feeling no guilt about her part in Agamemnon's murder, and scrupulous not to incur the displeasure of the gods, forbade him to do so. She allowed him, however, to marry Electra to a Mycenaen peasant who, being afraid of

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[9] This is found in Euripides' **Electra** : 33, 320 and 617 ; Hyginus' **Fabula** :119 ( qtd in Graves , Vol 2 : 61)

Orestes and also chaste by nature, never consummated their unequal union.[10]

Thus neglected by Clytemnestra, who had now borne Aegisthus three children, by name Erigone, Aletes and the second Helen, Electra lived in disgraceful poverty, and was kept under constant close supervision. In the end it was decided that, unless she accepted her fate as her sister Chrysothemis had done, and refrained from publicly calling Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra " adulterous murderers ", she would be banished to some distant place where the light of the sun never penetrated. Yet Electra despised Chrysothemis for her subservience and disloyalty to their dead father and secretly sent frequent reminders to Orestes of the vengeance required from him.

Orestes, now grown to manhood, visited the Delphic oracle, to inquire whether or not he should destroy his father's murderers. Apollo's answer, authorized by Zeus, was that if he neglected to avenge Agamemnon, he would become an outcast from society,debarred from entering any shrine or temple and afflicted with a leprosy that would eat his flesh, making it sprout white mould. He was recommended to pour libation beside Agamemnon's tomb, lay a ringlet of his hair upon it, and unaided by any company of spearmen, craftily execute the due punishment of the murderers. At the same time the Pythoness observed that the Erinyes would not readily forgive a matricide, and therefore, on behalf of Apollo, she gave Orestes a bow of horn, with which to repel their attacks, should they become insupportable. After fulfilling his orders, he must come again to Delphi, where Apollo would protect him.

In the eighth year, or according to some, after a passage of twenty years, Orestes secretly returned to Mycenae by way of Athens, determined to destroy both Aegisthus and

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[10] Euripides' **Electra** : 19 , 253 and 312 (qtd in Graves , Vol 2 : 61 )

his own mother.[11]

One morning, with Pylades at his side, he visited Agamemnon's tomb and there, cutting off a lock of his hair, he invoked infernal Hermes , patron of fatherhood. When a group of slave-women approached,dirty and dishevelled for the purposes of mourning, he took shelter in a near-by thicket to watch them. Now, on the previous night, Clytemnestra had dreamed that she gave birth to a serpent, which she wrapped in swaddling clothes and suckled. Suddenly she screamed in her sleep, and alarmed the whole palace by crying that the serpent had drawn blood from her breast, as well as milk. The opinion of the soothsayers whom she consulted was that she had incurred the anger of the dead; and these mourning slave-women consequently came on her behalf to pour libation upon Agamemnon's tomb, in the hope of appeasing his ghost. Electra, who was a member of the Libation Bearers, poured the libation in her own name, not her mother's; offered prayers to Agamemnon for vengeance, instead of pardon; and bade Hermes' plea.Noticing a ringlet of fair hair upon the tomb, she decided that it could belong only to Orestes; both because it closely resembled her own in colour and texture, and because no one else would have dared to make such an offering.

Torn between hope and doubt, she was measuring her feet against Orestes' foot-prints in the clay beside the tomb, and finding a family resemblance, when he emerged from his hiding place, showed her that the ringlet was his own, and produced the

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[11]Homer's **Odyssey** iii : 306 ; *Hypothesis* of Sophocles 's **Electra** ; Apollodorus' **Epitome** vi . 25 .( qtd in Graves , Vol 2 : 61 )

robe in which he had escaped from Mycenae *.

Electra welcomed him with delight, and together they invoked their ancestor, father Zeus, whom they reminded that Agamemnon had always paid him great honors, and that were the House of Atreus to die out, no one would be left in Mycenae to offer him the customary offerings, for Aegisthus worshipped other deities.[12]

When the slave-women told Orestes of Clytemnestra's dream, he recognized the serpent as himself and declared that he would indeed play the cunning serpent and draw blood from her false body. Then he instructed Electra to enter the palace and tell Clytemnestra nothing about their meeting. He and Pylades would follow after an interval and beg hospitality at the gate, as strangers and suppliants, pretending to be Phocians and using the Parnasian dialect. If the porter refused them admittance, Aegisthus' inhospitality would outrage the city; if he granted it, they would not fail to take vengeance.

Presently Orestes knocked at the palace gate, and asked for the master or mistress of the house. Clytemnestra herself came out, but did not recognize Orestes. He pretended to be an Aeolian from Daulis, bearing sad news from one Strophius, whom he had met by chance on the road to Argos; namely, that her son Orestes was dead, and that his ashes were being kept in a brazen urn. Strophius wished to know whether he should send these back to Mycenae, or bury them at Crisa.

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• Obs: The wide variation in the recognition scene , and in the plot by which Orestes contrives to kill Agamemnon and Clytemnestra , are of interest only as proving that the classical dramatists were not bound by tradition. Theirs was a new version of an ancient myth ; and both Sophocles and Euripides tried to improve on Aeschylus , who first formulated it , by making the action more plausible (Robert Graves' **The Greek Myths**).

[12] Aeschylus ' **Libation Bearers**

Clytaemnestra at once welcomed Orestes inside and, concealing her joy from the servants, sent his old nurse named Gelissa to fetch Aegisthus from a nearby temple. But Gelissa saw through Orestes' disguise and, altering the message, told Aegisthus to rejoice because he could now safely come alone and weaponless to greet the bearers of glad tidings: his enemy was dead.

Unsuspectingly, Aegisthus entered the Palace where, to create a further distraction, Pylades had just arrived, carrying a brazen urn. He told Clytemnestra that it held Orestes' ashes which Strophius had now decided to send to Mycenae. This seeming confirmation of the first message put Aegisthus completely off his guard; thus Orestes had no difficulty in drawing his sword and cutting him down.Clytemnestra then recognized her son and tried to soften his heart by baring her breast, and appealing to his filial duty. Orestes, however, beheaded her with a single stroke of the same sword, and she fell beside the body of her paramour. Standing over the corpses, he addressed the Palace servants, holding aloft the still blood stained net in which Agamemnon had died, eloquently exculpating himself for the murder of Clytemnestra by this reminder of her treachery, and adding that Aegisthus had suffered the sentence prescribed by law for adulterers.[13]

Other version say that these events took place in Argos, on the third day of Hera's festival, when the virgin's procession was about to begin. Aegisthus had prepared a banquet for the Nymphs near the horse-meadows, before sacrificing a bull to Hera, and was gathering myrtle-boughs to wreathe his head. It is added that Electra, meeting Orestes

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[13] This version of Orestes 'killing of Aegisthus and of his mother inside the palace, exactly in the same spot where Agamemnon was murdered by his wife, is found in Hyginus' **Fabula**; 119; Aeschylus '**Eumenides**: 592 and **Libation Bearers**: 973 (in Graves, 2 : 62)

by Agamemnon's tomb, would not believe at first that he was her long-lost brother, despite the similarity of their hair, and the robe he showed her. Finally, a scar on his forehead convinced her; because once, when they were children together, chasing a deer, he had slipped and fallen, cutting his head upon a sharp rock.

Obeying her whispered instructions, Orestes went at once to the altar where the bull had now been slaughtered and, as Aegisthus bent to inspect its entrails, struck off his head with the sacrificial axe. Meanwhile, Electra, to whom he presented his head, enticed Clytaemnestra from the palace by pretending that, ten days before, she had borne a son to her peasant husband; and when Clytaemnestra, anxious to inspect her first grand-child, visited the cottage, Orestes was waiting behind the door and killed her without mercy.[14]

In Sophocles'version[15], Clytaemnestra sent Chrysothemis to Agamemnon's tomb with the libations, having dreamed that Agamemnon, restored to life, snatched his sceptre from Aegisthus's hands and planted it so firmly in the ground that it budded and put forth branches, which overshadowed the entire land of Mycenae. According to this account, the news which deceived Aegisthus and Clytemnestra was that Orestes had been accidentally killed while competing in the chariot race at the Pythian games; and that Orestes showed Electra neither a ringlet nor an embroidered robe, nor a scar, in proof of his identity, but Agamemnon's seal, which was carved from a piece of Pelops' ivory shoulder. Still others, denying that Orestes killed Clytemnestra with his own hands, say that he committed her for trial by the judges, who condemned her to death, and that his one fault, if it may be

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[14] This version is found in Euripides' **Electra** ( Qtd in Graves , Vol 2 : 62)
[15] Sophocles' **Electra** 326 , 417 . ( Qtd in Graves , Vol 2 : 62 )

called a fault, was that he did not intercede on her behalf.[16]

The Mycenaens, who had supported Orestes in his unheard-of-action, would not allow the bodies of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus to lie within their city, but buried them at some distance beyond the walls. That night, Orestes and Pylades stood guard at Clytaemnestra's tomb lest anyone should dare rob it, but during their vigil, the serpent-haired, dog- haired, bat-winged Erinnyes * appeared, swinging their whippings. Driven to distraction by these fierce attacks, against which Apollo's bow of horn was of little avail, Orestes fell prostrate on a couch, where he lay for six days, his head wrapped in a cloak, refusing either to eat or to wash.

Old Tyndareus arrived from Sparta, and brought a charge of matricide against Orestes, summoning the Mycenaean chieftains to judge his case. He decreed that, pending the trial, none should speak either to Orestes or Electra, and that both should be denied shelter, fire, and water. Thus Orestes was prevented even from washing his blood-stained hands. The streets of Mycenae were lined with citizens in arms and Oeax, son of Nauplius, delighted in this opportunity to persecute Agamemnon's children.[17]

Meanwhile, Menelaus, laden with treasure, landed at Nauplia, where a fisherman told him that Aegisthus and Clytemnestra had been murdered. He sent Helen ahead to confirm the news at Mycenae. But by night, lest the kinsmen of those who had perished at

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[16] Servius on Virgil 's **Aeneid** XI: 268 ( qtd in Graves , Vol 2 : 62 )

• Erinnyes were personified pangs of conscience especially for purging blood guilt. The tradition that Clytemnestra 'Erinnyes drove Orestes mad cannot be dismissed as na invention of the Attic dramatists; it was too early established, not only in Greece, bu in Greater Greece. Yet, just as Oedipus 'crime of matricide is in a crucial degree and it requires punishment from the Erinnyes. (Graves, Vol 2: 69)

[17] Euripides' **Orestes**

Troy should stone her, Helen, feeling ashamed to mourn in public for her sister lytaemnestra, since she herself had caused even more bloodshed by her infidelities, asked Electra, who was now nursing the afflicted Orestes, to take offerings of her hair to put on Clytemnestra 's tomb as a form of libation to her ghost. But Electra refused to do so.

Menelaus then entered the palace, where he was greeted by his foster-father Tyndareus, clad in deep mourning, and was warned not to set foot on Spartan soil until he had punished his criminal nephew and niece. Tyndareus held that Orestes should have contented himself with allowing his fellow-citizens to banish Clytaemnestra. If they had demanded her death, he should have interceded on her behalf. Now they must be persuaded that not only Orestes, but also Electra who had urged him to murder their mother, should be stoned to death as matricides.

Pylades then led Orestes away, nobly refusing to desert either him or Electra, to whom he was betrothed; and proposed that, since all three must die, they should first punish Menelaus' cowardice and disloyalty by killing Helen, the originator of every misfortune that had befallen them. While, therefore, Electra waited outside the walls to execute her own design, that of intercepting Hermione on her return from Clytaemnestra's tomb and holding her as a hostage for Menelaus' good behavior-Orestes and Pylades entered the palace, with swords hidden beneath their cloaks and took refuge at the central altar, as though they were suppliants. Helen, who sat nearby, spinning wool for a purple robe to lay as gift on Clytaemnestra's tomb, was deceived by their lamentations, and approached to welcome them. Whereupon both drew their swords and, while Pylades chased away Helen's slaves, Orestes attempted to murder her. But Apollo, at Zeus' command, seized her in a cloud to Olympus, where she became an immortal, joining her

brothers, the Discuri, as a guardian of sailors in distress.

Meanwhile, Electra had secured Hermione, led her into the palace and barred the gates.Menelaus, seeing that death threatened his daughter, ordered an immediate rescue.His men burst open the gates, and Orestes was just about to set the palace alight, kill Hermione, and die himself either by sword or fire, when Apollo providentially appeared, wrenched the torch from his hand, and drove back Menelaus' warriors. In the awed hush caused by his presence, Apollo commanded Menelaus to take another wife, betroth Hermione to Orestes, and return to rule over Sparta; Clytemnestra's murder need no longer concern him, now that the gods had intervened.[18]

With wool-wreathed laurel, branch and chaplet, to show that he was under Apollo's protection, Orestes then set out for Delphi, still pursued by the Erinnyes. The Pythianpriestess was terrified to see him crouched as a suppliant on the marble navel-stone-stained by the blood from his unwashed hands-and the hideous troop of black Erinnyes sleeping beside him. Apollo, however, reassured her by promising to act as advocate for Orestes, whom he ordered to face his ordeal with courage. After a period of exile, he must make his way to Athens, and there embrace the ancient image of Athene who, as the Discuri had already prophesied, would shield him with her Gorgon-faced aegis, and annul the curse... While the Erinnyes were still far fast asleep, Orestes escaped under the guidance of Hermes; but Clytaemnestra's ghost soon entered the precinct, taking them to task, and reminding them that they had often received libations of wine and grim midnight banquets from her hand. They therefore set off in renewed pursuit, scornful of

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[18] Euripides : ibid

Apollo's angry threats to shoot them down.[19]

Orestes' exile lasted for one year-the period which must elapse before a homicide may again move among his fellow-citizens. He wandered far, over land and sea, pursued by the tireless Erinnyes and constantly purified both with the blood of pigs and with running water; yet these rites never served to keep his tormentors at bay for more than an hour or two, and he soon lost his wits. Hermes escorted him to Troezen, where he was lodged in what is now called the Booth of Orestes, which faces the Sanctuary of Apollo.

The Erinnyes, who had already begun to accuse him to the Athenians, were soon joined by Tyndareus with his grand- daughter Erigone, daughter of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra; also, some say, by Clytemnestra's cousin Perilaus, son of Icarius. But Athene, having heard Orestes' supplication from Scomander, her newly- acquired Trojan territory, hurried to Athens and, swearing in the noblest citizens as judges, summoned the Areopagus to try what was then only the second case of homicide to come before it.

In due course, the trial took place, Apollo, appearing as counsel for the defence, and the eldest of the Erinnyes as public prosecutrix. In an elaborate speech, Apollo denied the importance of motherhood, asserting that a woman was no more than the innert furrow in which the husband cast his seed, and that Orestes had been abundantly justified in his act, the father being the one parent worthy of the name. When the voting proved equal, Athene confessed herself wholly on the father's side, and gave her casting vote in favor of Orestes. Thus honorably acquitted, he returned in joy to Argolis, swearing to be a faithful ally of Athens so long as he lived. The Erinnyes, however, loudly lamented this

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[19] Aeschylus' **Eumenides** 94 ff : 106-9 and 179 ff ( qtd in Graves , Vol 2 : 68)

subversal of the ancient law by upstart gods; and Erigone changed herself for mortification. Later they were transformed into Eumenides, the gentle ones, as they agreed to Athene's good wishes, and were transfigured into charms, addressed as the solemned ones and bade farewell to Athene. They were conducted by Athene's people in a torchlight procession of youths, matrons and crones to the entrance of a deep grotto at the south-eastern angle of the Areopagus. Appropriate sacrifices were there offered to them, and they descended into the grotto, which is now both an oracular shrine and a place of refuge for suppliants.

This survey of the Greek myths, especially the ones connected to the Thyestes-Atreus curse-*Guénos*-relevant to the subject of this dissertation, includes many of the main themes of substantial proportion found in the heroic Greek myths .

The Electra theme to be explored in this dissertation has its roots in the Thyestes-Atreus-Agamemnon and Orestes/ Electra myths. In "modern" literature many playwrights have written revivals of the Greek myths, according to the great Greek tragedians: Giraudoux, Beckett, T.S. Eliot, Shaw, and Ibsen. The American playwright Eugene O'Neill has at least three plays with evident mythic characteristics. The plays which are evidently revivals of Greek plays are **Desire Under the Elms, Long Day's Journey into Night and Mourning Becomes Electra.**

The play **Desire Under the Elms** is considered a "representative masterpiece" of Greek drama . It is compared to Euripides' play **Hippolytus**. The Euripidean play is a tragedy of forbidden/incestuous love between the stepmother Phaedra (married to Theseus) and her stepson Hippolytus. O'Neill's play **Desire Under the Elms** follows the Greek pattern and there is the same impossible incestuous love between the stepmother

Abbie ( married to Ephraim ) and the stepson Ebbie. The most important difference is probably found in the way that modern characters deal with fate.

The play **Long Day's Journey into Night**, O'Neill's autobiographical family story, is considered the author's finest work. It seems that O'Neill has literally experienced the emotional content of this play, but it can also be considered a universal tragedy, since the play is not only a mere record of O'Neill's private agonies. The play's theme and its universal conflict-ridden characters make the play transcend time and space and become the archetype of man's eternal tragedy. **Long Day's Journey into Night** can be analyzed, like **Desire Under the Elms**, in terms of appropriation of classic material. O'Neill has taken great liberties in the reinvention of the classical play, the parallel is slightly suggested but it becomes obvious in the play's theme. As in Euripides' **The Bacchants** all of O'Neill's characters try to escape from reality through either drug or alcohol, as the "bacchants" (the main characters in Euripides' play ) escape from real life through Bacchus' "nectar" - wine.

O'Neill's **Mourning Becomes Electra** ( the trilogy analyzed in this dissertation) has many recurrences and resonances of some of the Greek myths. It is a retelling of Aeschylus' **Oresteia**, of Sophocles' **Electra** and of Euripides ' **Electra** and **Orestes**. It repeats the Atredians' myth of the family "guénos" inherited by Thyestes, Atreus, Agamemnon, Electra and Orestes. So O'Neill's **Mourning Becomes Electra** will be analyzed in its relationship to Greek myths.

## 2 - Approaches to Myth

There are many approaches to myth as it is studied by scientists, philosophers, historians, anthropologists, psychologists, theologians and others. This dissertation will focus on some of these approaches. The first to be cited is the critic/anthropologist, Mircea Eliade, in his view of myth as the legendary primordial happening in the life of man, responsible for everything that happens later on .

### 2.1 - Mircea Eliade

Mircea Eliade, who is a religion historian, in his work **The Sacred and the Profane**[20] discusses myth in its origin, and in both its sacred and profane aspects. He says that the reader will realize that the sacred and the profane constitute two modalities of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man throughout his history. These modes of being in the world are not only of interest to the history of religions or to human society and do not constitute the only object of historical, sociological and ethnological studies, but are part of man's life, of the human complete existence.

Eliade thinks that when the sacred is manifested by any kind of *Hierophania* (related to what is sacred), not only does a rupture in the homogeneity of space happen, but also a revelation of an absolute reality that is opposed to the non-reality of immense involving extension. The manifestation of the sacred creates the world ontologically. In

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[20] The source used here is Eliade's Portuguese version of **The Sacred and the Profane - O Sagrado e o Profano**, listed in the Bibliography.

that homogeneous and infinite extension where no reference point is possible and where therefore, no orientation can be given, the *hierophonia* is revealed through a "fixed" and absolute point-a "Center".

The Center of the world is always a sacred space. It has a profound signification, it is there where, through a hierophonia, the rupture of the levels of what has happened, at the same time that an "opening" at the top ( the divine world ) or at the bottom ( the inferior regions, the world of the dead ) took place. The three cosmic levels- Earth, Heaven and the inferior regions became able to communicate with one another.

For Christians, the center of the world is *the Golgota* which is located at the top of the Cosmic Mountain. Our world is a holy land, because it is the closest place to heaven, our world is then a "high place" ( "city on a hill", Jonathan Edwards). All the cosmological images, the holy cities and the sanctuary are situated in the center of the world. The temples are replicas of the Cosmic Mountain, and, consequently constitute the "connection" par excellence between Earth and Heaven.

The temple is an "image mundi"; it is also a terrestrial reproduction of a transcendental model. The Judaic conception of the temple was a copy of the celestial archetype. It is due to the temple that the world is resanctified in its totality.

It is the experience of the Sacred Temple that will permit the religious man to find the cosmos periodically just like it was at the beginning, at the mythic instant of creation. The sacred time, the time of origin par excellence, is the time of Cosmogony. That instant is the most vast reality which appeared to the world. It is for this reason that the Cosmogony serves as exemplary model to all "creation", to all kinds of "doing". It is for the same reason that the Cosmogonic time serves as model to all Sacred Time because

Sacred Time is the one in which the gods were manifested and created. It is evident that the most complete divine manifestation and the most gigantic creation is the world creation (Cosmogony ).

The virtual recitation of the Cosmogonic myth performs an important role in healings, when the regeneration of a human being in question. Myth tells a sacred history, that of a primordial happening that took place at the beginning of the world. But relating sacred history is equivalent to revealing a mystery, because the characters of the myth are not human beings, they are gods or civilized heroes.

For this reason, the origin of the myth constitutes a mystery. Man can not understand it, if it is not revealed. Myth is then the history of what happened in *illo tempore*, the narration of what the gods or the divine beings did at the beginning of Time. To "say" (to reveal ) a Myth is to proclaim what passed *ab origine*. Once a myth is expressed (revealed), the absolute truth is found. Myth proclaims the apparition of a new cosmic situation or of a primordial happening. Therefore it is always the narrative of a "creation". It tells how something was done, how it began. That is the reason for the relation of Myth to onthology: it speaks of realities, of what really happened, of what has really been manifested ( **O Sagrado e o Profano**: 21-72).

Eliade says that no god, no civilized hero has ever performed a profane act. Everything that the gods or their ancestors have done, that is, everything that myths tell about creative activity, belongs to the sphere of the sacred and, as a consequence, participates in the being. On the other hand, what men do by their own initiative, what they do without a mythic model, belongs to the sphere of the profane: it is then a vain and illusory or unreal activity. The more man is religious, the more he follows exemplary

models in his behavior and actions.

The aspect of myth that must be understood is this: myth reveals absolute sacrality because it relates the creative activity of the gods, it unveils ( reveals ) the sacrality of their works. In other words, myth describes the various and sometimes dramatic irruptions of the sacred in the world. For this reason, among many primitive peoples, the myths can not be proclaimed indifferently in any place and time, but only during the seasons that are rich in ritual ( Autumn, Winter ) or during the interval of the religious cerimonies; in a word, in an interval of the sacred time. It is the irruption of the sacred in the world, irruption that according to myth really founds the world. Each myth shows how a reality came into being, in its totality, the Cosmos, or only in a fragment, an island, vegetation, a human being. Narrating how things came into being (into existence), man explains and answers indirectly the question as why they came into existence. The reason is always part of the how. And for this simple reason, by telling how one thing was created, the ultimate cause of all real existence (the irruption of the sacred in the world ) is revealed.( Eliade : 85 ).

On the other hand, being all of creation a divine work and therefore the irruption of the sacred, this creation is also an irruption of the creative energy in the world. All creation springs from an abundance of things. The gods created through an excess of power, through an overflowing of energy. Creation occurs through an addition of the onthologic substance. That is the reason why the myth that tells this sacred origin of being, the victorious manifestation of this plenitude of being, becomes the exemplary model for all human activities: only myth reveals the real, the super abundant, the efficient.

The painful repetition of the divine models has a double result: firstly, in imitating the gods, man maintains himself within the sacred and consequently within reality; secondly, thanks to the uninterrupted reactualization of exemplary divine gestures, the world is santified . The religious behavior of people contributes toward maintaining the sanctity of the world (Eliade, **O Sagrado e o Profano**: 83).

It is interesting to notice that the religious man assumes a humanity that has a transcendental human model. He only recognizes himself as truly man to the extent that he imitates the gods, the civilized heroes or the mythic ancestors. In sum, the religious man wants to be different from what he finds himself to be, that is, in the plan of his profane existence.

It is necessary to underline that since the beginning of time, the religious man has established his own model for reaching the transhuman plan, the one revealed by the myths. Man only becomes a true man by following the teaching of the myths, by imitating the gods (Eliade, **O Sagrado e o Profano**: 84 ).

The *Imitato Dei* ( Imitation of God ) sometimes implies for the primitive people a great responsibility. Eliade reminds us that we have seen that certain bloody sacrifices find their justification in a primordial divine act: in *illo tempore*, the god of creation struck the sea monster and cut up its body in order to create the Cosmos. Primitive man repeats the bloody sacrifice-sometimes even with a human victim-when he must build a town, a temple or simply a house. The possible consequences of the *Imitato Dei* are revealed clearly by the mythologies and rituals of numerous primitive people. For all the paleocultivators, the essential thing consists in evoking periodically the primordial event responsible for the actual human condition. All his religious life is a commemoration, a re-

enactment. The reactualization remembered by rites ( thus the reiteration of the primordial sacrifice) performs a decisive role: man should not forget what has happened in *illo tempore*. The true sin is the forgetfulness of the primordial happening (Eliade : 86).

As an example of a reactualization of a primordial happening, one finds among the primitive peoples among whom the ritual of Cannibalism happens in order to preserve vegetal life. Cannibal dance and anthropophagism are forms of cultural behavior based on a religious view of life. As in the paleo-oriental civilizations, the *Imitato Dei* is not conceived in an idyllic manner, it implies, on the contrary, a terrible human responsibility.

In order to judge a "savage" society, it is necessary not to lose from sight that even the most barbarous acts and most aberrant behaviors have transhuman divine models. But for Eliade, what matters is only to underline that the religious man wanted to and believed he was imitating his gods even when he would let himself be taken to perform actions that would reach madness, evilness and crime.

Religion is always connected with History as any religious cult is the reactualization of a primordial event, of a "sacred history", in which the actors are the gods or the semi-divine gods. The "sacred history" is told through myths. As a consequence, the participants of the cult become contemporaries of the gods and of semidivine beings. The sacred calendar periodically regenerates time because it coincides with the *Origin Time*, the "strong" and "pure" time. By imitating his gods, the religious man starts to live in the *Origin time*, the *Mythic time* . In other words, to "leave" profane time is to rejoin an "immovable" and infinite time: eternity ( Eliade, **O Sagrado e o Profano**: 87).

For the religious man of the primitive societies, myths constitute his "sacred History", he should not forget them. By reactualizing the myths, the religious man gets close to his god and partakes of sanctity. But there are also "tragic divine histories" and man assumes great responsibility before himself and Nature in the periodical reactualization of the myths ( Ex Cannibalistic rituals; tragic religious conceptions; Dionysian orgies ). In sum, for Eliade, by the reactualization of the myths, the religious man attempts to get closer to himself, to the gods and to participate in the Being. The imitation of exemplary divine models expresses, at the same time, his wish for sanctity and his onthologic nostalgia.

The sacred calendar repeats annually the same feasts, that is, the commemoration of the same mythic events. Strictly speaking, the sacred calendar presents an "eternal return" of a limited number of divine gestures and that is true not only for the primitive religions but also for all the other religions. Everywhere, the festive calendar constitutes a periodical return of the same primordial situations and consequently, the reactualization of the same sacred time.

It is due to this "eternal return" to the sacred sources of the real and to the reactualization of the Sacred Time, that the human existence seems to be saved from nothingness and from death.

Greece also knew the "myth of the eternal return", and philosophers of later epochs took the concept of the Circular Time to its extreme limits. All cosmic happenings, as well as the duration of this world of degeneration and corruption that is our world, will be developed in a circle or according to an indefinite succession of cycles in which course the same reality is made and remade again .

The sacred is found in Nature. One of the myths of origin is Gae( which means Earth ), the creator of all the earthly beings. Mother Earth is the primordial image. One finds this image in all parts of the world, under various forms and variants. It is the mother Earth or Tellus Mater, well known by the Mediterranean religions, that gives birth to all beings. One can hear it in the Homeric hymn to the earth: - "I will sing to the Earth". And in Aeschylus' **The Choephoroe**, he glorifies the Earth that gives light to all beings, the one that nourishes them and later receives from them the fecund germ.

Other elements important to myths, according to Eliade, are the rites of passages as they perform an important role in the life of the religious man. It is certain that the rites of passage "par excellence" are represented by the beginning of puberty ( the passage from one age to another, from childhood to adolescence). But there are also passages in birth, in marriage and in death, and one can say that in each of the cases, one is always talking about an initiation, as it always involves a radical change of ontological regime and social status.

The rites of passage are explored in another article by Eliade **"Modern Man's Need to Understand the Rites of Passages "** ( in Cafferata: 27 - 93 ). In this article he questions modern man's approach to rites of passage. He comments that the rites are disappearing in the modern world and that they continue present especially in Christianity (Baptism, ordination etc). But he also comments that Christianity is not the best example of the valorization of primitive rites since it triumphed in the world and became a universal religion only because it detached itself from the climate of the Greco-Oriental mysteries and proclaimed itself a religion of salvation accessible to all.

Eliade thinks that modern man's originality does not depend on Christianity. His newness, in comparison with traditional societies, lies precisely in his determination to regard himself as a purely historical being, in his wish to live in a basically desacralized Cosmos.

It is through the initiation rite that the man of traditional societies comes to know and to assume the image of himself. Obviously there are numerous types and countless variants of initiation, corresponding to different social structures and cultural horizons. But the important fact is that all Pre-Modern Societies give primary importance to the ideology and technique of initiation.

The term *initiation* denotes, in the most general sense, oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated. In philosophical terms, initiation is equivalent to a basic change in existential conditions; the novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a totally different vision from the one he possessed before his initiation. Among the various categories of initiation, the puberty initiation is particularly important for an understanding of pre-modern man. These "transition rites" were obligatory for all the youths of the tribe. To gain the right to be admitted among adults, the adolescent had to pass through a series of initiatory ordeals. It was by virtue of these rites, and of the revelation that they entail, that he will be recognized as a responsible member of society. Initiation introduces the candidate into the human community and into the world of spiritual and cultural values. He learns not only the behavior patterns-the techniques and the institutions of adults-, but also the sacred myths and traditions of the tribe, the names of the gods, and the history of their work. Above all, he learns the mystical relations between the tribe and the

supernatural beings, as those relations were established at the beginning of time.

Every primitive society possesses a consistent body of mythical tradition, a "conception of the world", and it is this conception that is revealed to the novice in the course of his initiation. What is involved is not simply instruction in the modern sense of the word. In order to become worthy of the sacred teaching, the novice must first be prepared spiritually. What he learns concerning the world and human life does not constitute knowledge in the modern sense of the term, objective and compartmentalized information, subject to indefinite correction and addition. The world is the work of supernatural beings-a divine work and hence sacred in its very structure ( The same line of thought in Eliade's **The Sacred and the Profane**). Man lives in a universe that is not only supernatural in origin, but is no less sacred in its form, sometimes even in its substance. The world has a "history" first, its creation by supernatural Beings, then everything that took place after that-the coming of the civilized Hero or the mythical Ancestor, their cultural activities, their demiurgic adventures , and at last their disappearance.

Sacred History, that is, Mythology, is exemplary, paradigmatic: not only does it relate how things came to be but it also lays the foundations to all human behavior and to all social and cultural institutions. From the fact that man was created and civilized by supernatural beings, it follows that the sum of his behavior and activities belongs to sacred history; and this history must be carefully preserved and transmitted intact to succeeding generations. Basically, man is what he is because, at the dawn of Time, certain things happened to him, things narrated by the myths. Just as modern man proclaims himself a historical being, constituted by the whole history of humanity, so the man of archaic societies considered himself the end product of a mythical history, that is, of a series of

events that took place in *illo tempore*, at the beginning of Time. But whereas modern man sees in the history that precedes him a purely human work and, more especially, he believes that he has the power to continue and perfect it indefinitely, for the man of traditional societies everything was significant, that is, everything creative and powerful that ever happened, took place at the beginning, in the Time of the Myths.

The Cosmogonic myth serves as the paradigm, the exemplary model, for every kind of creation. Nothing better ensures the success of any creation ( a village, a house, a child) than the fact of copying it after the greatest of all creations, the Cosmogony (Eliade, **O Sagrado e o Profano**: 48 - 94 ). Since, in the eyes of the primitives cosmogony, primarily represents the manifestation of the creative power of the gods, and therefore a prodigious irruption of the sacred, it is periodically reiterated in order to regenerate the world and human society. The symbolic repetition of creation implies a reactualization of the primordial event, hence the presence of the gods and their creative energies.The return to beginnings finds expression in a reactivation of the sacred forces that were then been manifested for the first time. If the world could be restored to the state in which it was at the moment when it came to birth, if the gestures that the gods had made for the first time at the beginning were reproduced, society and the entire cosmos would become what they had been then-pure, powerful, effectual, with all their possibilities intact.

Myths lead us into a world that cannot be described but only "narrated", for they consist in the history of acts freely undertaken,of unforeseeable decisions, of fabulous transformations, and the like. They are, in short, the history of everything significant that has happened since the creation of the world, of all the events that have contributed to making man as he is today. The novice whose initiation introduces him to the mythological

traditions of the tribe is also introduced to the sacred history of the world and humanity.

Modern man no longer has any initiation of the traditional type. Certain initiatory themes survive in Christianity, but the various Christian denominations no longer regard them as possessing the values of initiation. The rituals, imagery and terminology borrowed from the mysteries of late antiquity have lost their initiatory aura. For twenty centuries they have formed an integral part of the symbolism and ceremonial of the Christian Church (Faith ).

Modern man still maintains an interest in occult sects, secret societies, pseudo-initiatory groups, hermetic or neospiritualistic movements and the like. These sects constitute an expression of a cultural phenomenon found almost everywhere in the Western World. It is no new phenomenon. Interest in occultism, accompanied by a tendency to form more or less secret societies or groups "appeared" in Europe in the 16th century. But modern man's interests in these sects are mainly sociological and psychological; they illustrate the disorientation of a part of the modern world, the desire to find a substitute for religious faith. They also illustrate the indomitable inclination of man toward the mysterious, the occult, the beyond-an inclination that is an integral part of the human being, and that is found in all ages, on all levels of culture, especially in periods of crisis.

The initiatory themes remain alive chiefly in modern man's unconscious. This is confirmed not only by the initiatory symbolism of certain artistic creations- poems, novels, works of plastic art, films-but also by their public reception. Such a massive and spontaneous acceptance proves, it seems to us, that in the depth of his being modern man is still capable of being affected by initiatory scenarios or messages. One finds it in books

or in films, stories that revolve around ordeals of the hero in quest of immortality, that touch upon the mystery of the redemption of the world, that reveal the secrets of regeneration through woman or love.

It is not surprising that critics are increasingly attracted by the religious implications, and especially by the initiatory symbolism of modern literary works.Literature plays an important part in contemporary civilization. Reading itself, as a distraction and escape from the historical present, constitutes one of the characteristic traits of modern man. Hence it is only natural that modern man should seek to satisfy his suppressed or inadequately satisfied religious needs by reading certain books that, though apparently "secular", in fact contain mythological figures camouflaged as contemporary characters and offer initiatory scenarios in the guise of everyday happenings.

The genuineness of this half-conscious or unconscious desire to share in the ordeals that regenerate and finally save a Hero is proved, among other things, by the presence of initiatory themes in the dreams and imaginative activity of modern man. C.G. Jung has stressed the fact that the process that he terms individuation, and that, in his view, constitutes the ultimate goal of human life, is accomplished through a series of ordeals of initiatory type.

Initiation lies at the core of any genuine human life. And this is true for two reasons. The first is that any genuine human life reconquers his/her self through "death" and resurrection. The second is that, whatever degree of fulfillment it may have brought him, at certain moments every man sees his life as a failure. This vision does not arise from a moral judgment made about his past, but from an obscure feeling that he has missed his vocation, that he has betrayed the best that was in him. In such moments of total crisis,

only one hope seems to offer any issue-the hope of beginning life over again. This means, in short, that the man undergoing such a crisis dreams of a new, regenerated life, fully realized and significant. This is something other and far more profound than the obscure desire of every human soul to renew itself periodically, as the cosmos is renewed. The hope, the dream of these moments of total crisis is to obtain a definitive and total renovation, a renewal capable of transmuting life. Such renewal is the result of every genuine religious conversion.

Genuine and definitive conversions are comparatively rare in modern societies. To Eliade, this makes it all the more significant that even nonreligious men sometimes, in the depths of their being, feel the desire for this kind of spiritual transformation, which, in other cultures, constitutes the very goal of initiation. Traditional initiations proclaimed their intention, and claimed to possess the means of transmuting human life. The nostalgia for an initiatory renewal which sporadically arises from the inmost depths of modern nonreligious man hence seems to us highly significant. It would appear to represent the modern formulations of man's eternal longing to find a positive meaning in death, to accept death as a transition rite to a higher mode of being. Initiation constitutes a specific dimension of human existence, this is true, above all, because it is only in initiation that death is given a positive value. Death prepares the new, purely spiritual birth, the access to a mode of being not subject to the destroying action of Time.

So according to Eliade myth is still found in modern man, as this man still carries inside himself all of a camouflaged mythology and numerous common ritualisms such as the New Year, Birth, marriage, social ascension, etc.

One could write an entire work about modern man's myths, about the camouflaged mythologies found in the shows and spectacles he prefers and in the books he reads. The movies, this "factory of dreams", retakes and uses unnumbered mythic motives (themes): the fight between the hero and the monster, the combats and the uncyclic proofs, the exemplary figures and images ( "Maid", "Hero" , "Heroine", "Hell", "Heavens" etc ). Even a reading fits a mythologic function, not only because it replaces the narration of myths in the archaic societies and the oral literature, still alive in the rural communities of Europe, but especially because thanks to the reading, modern man is able to obtain an "exit" in "time" comparable to that of the myths.

In minor religions, Marxism, mysticism, politics, one can find camouflaged or degenerated religious forms of behavior ( for example Marxism once was a "religion" to its followers ). One can recognize them also in movements that are proclaimed to be frankly laic, even anti-religious, such as nudism, the movements in favor of absolute sexual freedom , all ideologies where it is possible to decipher the remains of the "nostalgia" of Paradise, the wish to reestablish the edenic stage before the fall, when sin did not exist and where there was not a rupture between the beatitudes of flesh and the conscience (Eliade, **Myth and Reality**: 168 ).

The majority of people "without religion" still share pseudo-religious and degraded mythologies. Eliade comments that this fact does not surprise him, because as he has previously affirmed, the profane man descends from the religious-homo and he can not annul his own history, that is, the behavior of his religious ancestors that has made him the way he is today. Besides that, a great part of his existence is nourished by pulsations that came to him from the depth of his being, from the unconscious zone. A man exclusively

rational is an abstraction, nobody has ever met him in reality. All human beings are constituted at the same time by a conscious activity and by irrational experiences.

In Eliade's **Myth and Reality**, one can find the same line of thought of **The Sacred and the Profane**. He begins the work by stressing the importance of the "alive myth". He says that more than a century ago, the Western specialists situated the study of myth in a perspective that radically contrasted with that of the XIX century. Instead of treating the word Myth in its real definition ( "fable", "invention"), like their ancestors, they accepted it as it was understood in the archaic societies,according to which, on the contrary, the myth assigns a "true history" and above all, a highly precious one, because it is a sacred, exemplary and "meaningful history". But this new semantic value assigned to the word "myth" makes its use in the current language a very equivocal one. Indeed this term is today used even in the sense of "fiction" or of "illusion" as in the familiar sense, especially for ethnologists, sociologists, and historians of religion.

Eliade's investigation in this book ( as well as in all the others explained in this section ) is about societies in which Myth is or was "alive", until a short time ago, in the sense that it has provided models for the human behavior and for this reason offers meaning and value to existence. To comprehend the structure and the function of myths in the traditional societies in question is not only to explain a stage in the history of human thought, it is also to understand better a category of our contemporary people.

Eliade's approach to myth is important to the study of some literary but also mythological figures to be analyzed in this dissertation. Other experts in mythology, each in their specific areas, will be mentioned throughout this work.

There have been three major developments in the modern study of myth. The first was the realization, associated especially with Tylor, Frazer and Durkheim ( retaken lately by Eliade ) that the myths of primitive societies are highly relevant to the subject as a whole. The second was Freud's discovery of the unconscious and its relation to myths and dreams ( which will be explained later ). The third is the structural theory proposed by the great French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss-it is the structural approach to myth, to be discussed in the following pages.

**2) Claude Lévi - Strauss**

The essence of Lévi-Strauss's belief is that myth is one mode of human communication, like economic exchange, and kinship exchanges by means of women, or other means. It is a product of language, which itself, together with music and rhythmical sound, forms a fourth auditory mode. Just as the elements of language-sounds or phonemes-are meaningless in isolation, and only take on significance in combination with other phonemes, so elements, persons or objects are meaningless in themselves, and only take on significance through their relation with each other. But it is not the formation of mere narrative as such that is significant; rather it is the underlying structure of relations that determines the real "meaning" of a myth, just as it is the underlying structure of a language that gives significance as a means of communication. Various versions of myth may show changes in the surface meaning, but the structure and basic relationships will often remain constant- indeed may even be emphasized by the alteration of the overt symbols and by consequent inversions or other forms of transformation. Yet this significant structure is usually, in tribal societies at least, an unconscious one, which does not prevent it from reflecting popular preoccupations with social or seasonal contradictions, like those presented by sisters- in -law or by the growth and decay of vegetation and men ( Kirk: 42- 43).

In **Structural Anthropology**, especially in the chapter "The Structural Study of Myth", Lévi-Strauss stresses the relation between religion and mythology. He says that in all the chapters of religious anthropology, probably none has tarried to the same extent as studies in the field of mythology. From a theoretical point of view the situation remains

very much the same as it was fifty years ago, namely chaotic. Myths are still widely interpreted in conflicting ways: as collective dreams, as the outcome of a kind of aesthetic play, or as the basis of ritual. Mythological figures are considered as personified abstractions, divinized heroes or fallen gods. Whatever the hypothesis, the choice amounts to reducing mythology either to idle play or to a crude kind of philosophic speculation (Lévi - Strauss, **Structural Anthropology** : 206-231).

In order to understand what myth really is, Lévi-Strauss asserts that one must choose between platitude and sophism. Some claim that human societies merely express, through their mythology, fundamental feelings common to the whole of mankind, such as love, hate, or revenge or that they try to provide some kind of explanation for phenomena which they cannot otherwise understand: astronomical, metereological, and the like. On the other hand, psychologists and many anthropologists have shifted the problem away from the natural or cosmological toward the sociological and psychological fields. But then, he says, the interpretations become too easy: if a given mythology confers prominence to a certain figure, let us say an evil grandmother, it will be claimed that in such a society grandmothers are actually evil and that mythology reflects the social structure and the social relations; But should the actual data be conflicting, it would be as readily claimed that the purpose of mythology is to provide an outlet for repressed feelings. Whatever the situation , a clever dialectic will always find a way to pretend that a meaning has been found.

Mythology confronts the student with a situation which at first sight appears contradictory. On one hand, it would seem that in the course of a myth anything is likely to happen. There is no logic, no continuity. Any characteristic can be attributed to any

subject; every conceivable relation can be found. With myth, everything becomes possible. But on the other hand, this apparent arbitrariness is belied by the astounding similarity between myths collected in widely different regions. Therefore the problem: if the content of a myth is contigent, Lévi-Strauss asks, how can one explain the fact that myths throughout the world are so similar?

It is precisely this awareness of a basic antinomy pertaining to the nature of myth that may lead us toward its solution. For the contradiction which we face is very similar to that which in ealier times brought considerable worry to the first philosophers concerned with linguistic problems; linguistics could only begin to evolve as a science after this contradiction had been overcome. Lévi-Strauss thinks that ancient philosophers reasoned about language the way he does about mythology. On the one hand, they did not notice that in a given language certain sequences of sounds were associated with definite meanings, and they earnestly aimed at discovering a reason for the linkage between *sounds* and that *meaning*. Their attempt however was thwarted from the very beginning by the fact that the same sounds were equally present in other languages, although the meaning they conveyed was entirely different.The contradiction was surmounted only by the discovery that it is the combination of sounds, not the sounds themselves, which provides the significant data.

It is easy to see, moreover, that some of the more recent interpretations of mythological thought originated from the same kind of misconception under which those early linguists were laboring. Lévi-Strauss considers, for instance, Jung's idea that a given mythological pattern- the so-called archetype- possesses a certain meaning. This is comparable to the long- supported error that a sound may possess a certain affinity with

meaning. He thinks that there is a consensus in the Saussurean principle of the *arbitrary character of linguistic signs* which was a prerequisite for the accession of linguistics to the scientific level.

To invite the mythologist to compare his precarious situation with that of the linguist in the prescientific stage is not enough. As a matter of fact Lévi-Strauss affirms that there is a good reason why myth cannot simply be treated as language if its specific problems are to be solved. He defines myth as equivalent to language: "Myth is language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is part of human speech. "( Lévi - Strauss, **Structural Anthropology**: 209 )". He says that myth should be at the same time the same as language and also something different from it, and this should happen in order to preserve its specificity. So for this reason, the past experiences of the linguistic should be useful, for language and myth must be analyzed as things which are at the same time similar and yet different. This is precisely what is expressed in Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, one being the structural side of language, the other the static aspect of it, *langue* belonging to a reversible time, *parole* being non- reversible. If those two levels already exist in language, then a third one can conceivably be isolated.

Lévi-Strauss has also distinguished *langue* and *parole* by the different time referents which they use. Keeping this in mind, he notices that myth uses a third referent which combines the properties of the first two. On the one hand, a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago. But what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future. This can be made clear through a comparison between myth and what appears to have largely replaced it in modern societies, namely politics. He mentions the

French Revolution as an example and gives a description from one of its politically minded historians ( Michelet's ): "That day... everything was possible... Future became present... that is, no more time, a glimpse of eternity." It is this double structure, altogether historical and ahistorical, which explains how myth, while pertaining to the realm of *parole* and calling for an explanation as such, as well as to that of *langue* in which it is expressed, can also be an absolute entity on a third level which, though it remains linguistic by nature, is nevertheless distinct from the other two.

Lévi-Strauss has a remark in order to show the originality of myth in relation to other linguistic phenomena. In comparing Myth to Poetry, one can say that the latter is a kind of speech which cannot be translated except at the cost of serious distraction; whereas the inherent value of the myth is preserved even through the worst translations. Whatever our ignorance of the language and the culture of the people where it originated, a myth is still seen as a myth by any reader anywhere in the world. Its substance does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax, but in the story which it tells. Myth is language, functioning on an especially high level where meaning succeeds practically in "taking off" from the linguistic ground on which it is maintained .

Lévi-Strauss sums up the discussion by reminding us that so far he has made the following claims: 1) If there is a meaning to be found in mythology, it cannot reside in the isolated elements which enter into the composition of a myth, but only in the way those elements are combined. 2) Although myth belongs to the same category as language, being, as a matter of fact, only part of it, language in myth exhibits specific properties. 3) Those properties are only to be found *above* the ordinary linguistic level, that is, they exhibit more complex features than those which are to be found in any other kind of

linguistic expression.

He continues by saying that, if the above three points are granted, two consequences will follow: 1) Myth, like the rest of language, is made up of constituent units. 2) These constituent units presuppose the constituent units present in language when analyzed on the other levels (phonemes, morphemes and sememes), but they, nevertheless, differ from the latter in the same way as the latter differ among themselves; they belong to a higher and more complex order. And for this reason he calls them gross constituent units.

The author uses a technique of cards in order to identify and isolate these gross constituent units - mythemes. They are not found among phonemes, morphemes or sememes except on a higher level-that is, on the sentence level. Lévi-Strauss then analyzes each myth individually, breaking down its story into the shortest possible sentences, and writing each sentence on an index card bearing a number corresponding to the unfolding of the story. Practically each card will thus show that a certain function is exercised by a given subject and each gross constituent unit will consist of a relation. Later in the article he realizes that the true constituent units of a myth are not isolated relations but *bundles of such relations*, and it is only as bundles that these relations can be put to use and combined so as to produce a meaning. Relations pertaining to the same bundle may appear diachronically at remote intervals, but when he succeeded in grouping them together, he recognizes a myth according to a time referent of a new nature, corresponding to the prerequisite of the initial hypothesis, namely a two dimensional time referent which is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic, and which accordingly integrates the characteristics of *langue* on the one hand, and those of *parole* on the other. Lévi-Strauss

reminds the reader that the task of analyzing mythological literature, which is extremely bulky, and of breaking it down into its constituent units, requires team work and technical help.

Lévi-Strauss ends the chapter on "The Structural Study of Myth" with some conclusive remarks. One of them is related to the question, which has often been raised, why myths, and more generally, oral literature, are much addicted to duplication, triplication or quadriplication of the same sequences. If his hypothesis is accepted, the answer is obvious: the function of repetition is to render the structure of the myth apparent. He recalls that the synchronic - diachronic structure of the myth permits us to organize it into diachronic sequences which should be read synchronically. Thus a myth exhibits a "slated" structure, which comes to the surface, so to speak, through the process of repetition.

Kirk disagrees with Lévi-Strauss in his use of the linguistic analogy which he considers ambivalent and confusing in its application to myth. The function of language is to convey content he says, not to convey its own grammatical structure and syntactical rules, i. e, its own structure. Therefore it would be wrong to imply ( as Lévi-Strauss does) that the meaning of myth is conveyed by its own structure, corresponding with syntax in language. If the myth- language analogy is valid, then myths, like language, will convey messages distinct from their own structure. Kirk thinks that it would be preferable to say that the message conveyed by a myth is a product of its overt contents and the relation between them, that is, it is not merely a structure, but a structure of particular materials, and one that is partly determined by them.

According to Lévi-Strauss, within a myth, a structure can reveal itself at different levels, by means of different codes. Among South American Myths, he distinguishes a sociological, a culinary ( or techno- economic ), an acoustic, a cosmological, and an astronomical code. Any one myth may contain some or all of these. If so, then its "message", and the significant relationships that compose it, will be reproduced more or less analogously in each of the separate codes-assuming, that is, that the myth is complete.

The idea of a mediation between two poles/ extremes, which Lévi-Strauss sees as the central characteristic of all myths, often seems curious in relation to a particular example. It becomes especially hard to accept when the message ( or relevant mediation ) is not conveyed by the identification of a privileged level, of a basic code which is revealed by the determination of analogous codes derived from other levels of reference. But when in a severe mood, Lévi-Strauss insists that the message of the myth is conveyed by its structure as a whole, or by the amalgam of relationships ( and mediation ) at all levels. In this case, presumably, the message conveyed is very abstract, in accordance with his own pronouncement that "mythical" thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward resolution. He admits that in most cases the authors or reproducers of myths will be unconscious of the meaning he, Lévi-Strauss, attributes to them. Mythical analysis, he writes, cannot have for its object the demonstration of how men think in their myths, but "how" myths think themselves in men, even without their awareness.

In considering Lévi-Strauss' s theories about myths, the following must be kept in mind. First, Lévi-Strauss's attempt to systematize myths, that is, the telling of all myths in every version in relation to its culture, is a continuous task which is never completed .

The basic premise of Lévi-Strauss's approach is contrary to most American system theories, which tend to deal with observable data and to ignore the unconscious structure of the mind. Second, the French use of the term "scientific" is not linked to empirical proof in the same way that its American equivalent is. Thirdly, French writers traditionally have brought personal experiences to their interpretations of history. Together, these intellectual habits have generated a highly allusive form of discourse, which allows for many divergent interpretations of Lévi-Strauss's original theories.

According to Edith Kuzweil in her work **The Age of Structuralism**, Lévi - Strauss never seemed to realize that his questions were generally more scientific than his answers. She says that Lévi-Strauss disregards the whole question of science and myth when he talks about the ultimate and fundamental opposition of structuralism as represented in Hamlet's dilemma. He says that Hamlet has no choice between being and non-being: he is eternally caught and forced to swing between ever- new contradictions until he dies. Thus life and death, Lévi-Strauss concludes, are both the fundamental and the ultimate opposition of structuralism ( Kuzweil: 28-29 ).

Lévi - Strauss has greatly contributed to the study of myth, to structuralism and to anthropology. His approach to myth will be useful to the study of myth in this dissertation. There are other important scholars who directly or indirectly have contributed to the study of myth. Freud and Jung have greatly contributed to another kind of view of myth, especially in literature, with their respective creation of the Oedipus and the Electra complexes so greatly explored in modern literature.

## 2.3 - Freud and Jung

Freud created the term and the conception of the Oedipus complex based on the myth of Oedipus. In order to explain "abnormal" sexuality in a child in his/her excessive love for one of the parents ( especially the mother ), Freud has based his theories on the myth of Oedipus, on Oedipus' parricide, and on his incestuous relationship with his mother Iocasta.

In the section dedicated to the analysis of the Oedipus complex in his **Complete Works**, Freud says that in the child's first instance of life, the oral instinct finds satisfaction by attaching itself to the sating of the desire for nourishment; and its object is the mother's breast.

Freud continues his explanation by emphasizing that the Oedipus complex is a central phenomenon in the life of a child. According to Freud, in the very earliest years of childhood ( approximately between the ages of two and five ), a convergence of the sexual impulses occurs of which, in the case of boys, the object is the mother. The choice of this object, in conjunction with a corresponding attitude of rivalry and hostility towards the father provides the content of what is known as the Oedipus Complex which, in every human being, is of the greatest importance in determining the final shaping of his sexuality. It has been found to be characteristic of a normal individual that he learns to master his Oedipus complex, whereas the neurotic subject remains involved in it ( Freud, **Standard Edition** : 246 ).

Towards the end of the 5th year, the first period of sexuality normally comes to an end. It is succeeded by a period of more or less complete latency, during which ethical

restraints are built up, to act as defences against the desires of the Oedipus complex. In the subsequent period of puberty, the Oedipus complex is revivified in the unconscious and embarks upon further modifications. It is only at puberty that the sexual instincts develop to full intensity; but the direction of that development, as well as the predispositions for it, have already been determined by the early efflorescence of sexuality during the childhood which preceded it. The development of the sexual function in two stages, interrupted by the latency period appears to be a biological peculiarity of the human species and contains the determining factor for the origin of neurosis. That is one of the reasons why the Oedipus complex appears so often in literature as the most frequent cause of the neurosis, anguish and hysteria of most of the characters.

Another work by Freud ( **Collected Papers** Vol II, chapter XXVIII: 269 ) is also dedicated to the Oedipus Complex, in which Freud continues his argument of the significance of the Oedipus complex in the child's development. Freud reiterates the significance of the Oedipus complex as the central phenomenon of the sexual period in early childhood cannot be denied. After this, it disappears; it succumbs to repression and is followed by the latency period. But it is not yet clear to Freud what occasions its decay; analyses seem to show that the painful disappointments experienced bring this about. The little girl who wants to believe herself her father's beloved and partner in love must one day endure a harsh punishment at his hands, and find herself hurled to earth from her castles in the air. The boy who regards his mother as his own property finds that her love and care for him are transferred by a new arrival ( of a new baby for example ). Reflection deepens the effect of these impressions by insisting that painful experiences of this kind, antagonistic to the content of the complex, are inevitable. Even when no special events

such as those mentioned above occur, the absence of the hoped-for gratification, the continual frustration of the wish of a child, causes the love- lorn little one to turn from its hopeless longing. According to this, the Oedipus- complex becomes extinguished by its lack of success , the result of its inherent impossibility (Freud: 269 ).

Another view would have it that the Oedipus Complex must come to an end because the time has come for its dissolution, just as the milk-teeth fall out when the permanent ones begin to press forward. Although the majority of children individually pass through the Oedipus complex, it is, after all, a phenomenon determined and laid down by heredity and it must decline according to arrival of the next pre-ordained stage of development. It is therefore not very important what the occasions are by which this happens, or whether any such occasions are discoverable at all.

Freud has also discussed before, in the **Collected Papers,** that the sexual development of a child advances up to a certain point, and that when it reaches this point the genital organ has already taken over the leading part. The genital organ in question, however, is the male alone, or more exactly, the penis; the female organ is still undiscovered. This phallic phase, which is contemporaneous with the Oedipus complex, does not develop further into the final stage of genital organization, but becomes submersed, and is succeeded by the latency period. Its conclusion however, is effected in a typical manner and in conjunction with happenings that recur regularly.

The phallic stage of the genital organization succumbs to the threat of castration. But not immediately, and not without the assistance of further influences. For to begin with, the young boy does not believe in this threat, nor obeys it in the least. Psychoanalysis has recently laid fresh emphasis on two experiences which all children go through and by

which it is thought that they become prepared for the loss of a valued part of the body: the withdrawal from them of the mother's breast, at first intermittently and later finally. (Freud: 271).

Freud observes that one cannot overlook the fact that the child's sexuality at this time is by no means exhausted by masturbation. The child is demonstrably under the influence of the Oedipus attitude toward its parents and masturbation is only the discharge in the genitals of the excitation which is part of that complex . To this connection between the complex itself and its manifestation , masturbation will owe its significance to him for ever after. The Oedipus complex offers the child two possibilities of satisfaction, an active one ( by replacing the father ) and a passive one ( by replacing the mother). The child can put itself in its father's place and have intercourse with the mother or be loved by the father, whereupon the mother becomes superfluous. The child may have only the vaguest notions of what constitutes the love- intercourse which serves as a gratification, but that the penis plays a part in it is certain, for the feelings in his own organ are evidence of that. But then the acceptance of the possibility of castration, the recognition that women are castrated, makes an end of both the possibilities of satisfaction in the Oedipus - complex (Freud , C.P.:272).

Analytic observation enables us to perceive or to infer these connections between the phallic organization, the Oedipus complex, the threat of castration, the formation of the super-ego and the latency period. They justify the statement that the Oedipus complex succumbs to the threat of castration. But this does not dispose of the problem; there is room for a theoretical speculation which may overthrow the results obtained or set them in a new light. Before traversing this path, however, one must attend to a question which

was already mentioned during this discussion and has long been left to one side. The question is to find how the corresponding development is effected in a little girl.

The female sex develops an Oedipus - complex too ( later Jung calls it the Electra Complex), a super- ego and a latency period. One may ascribe to it a phallic organization and a castration complex, but it cannot be the same as in the boy. Freud notices here that the "feministic" demands for equal rights between the sexes does not carry far here; the morphological difference must express itself in differences in the development of the mind. The little girl's clitoris behaves at first just like a penis, but by comparing herself with a male playfellow, she perceives that she is different, and takes this fact as ill- treatment and as a reason for feeling inferior. For a time she still consoles herself with the expectation that later, when she grows up, she will acquire just as big an appendage as a boy. Here the woman's "masculine complex" branches off. The female child does not understand her actual loss of a sexual characteristic, but explains it by assuming that at some earlier date she had possessed a member which was just as big and which later had been lost by castration. She does not seem to extend this conclusion about herself to other grown women, but in complete accordance with the phallic phase she ascribes to them large and complete, that is male, genitalia. The result is an essential difference between herself and the male child, namely that she accepts castration as an established fact, an operation already performed, whereas the boy dreads the possibility of its being performed.

The dread of castration being thus excluded in her case, there falls away a powerful motive towards forming the super-ego and breaking- up the infantile genital organization. These changes seem to be due in the girl, far more than in the boy, to the results of the educative influences of external intimidation, threatening the loss of love.

The Oedipus- complex in the girl is far simpler, less equivocal, than that of the male child who possesses a penis; it seldom goes beyond the wish to take the mother's place, a typically feminine attitude towards the father. However, acceptance of the loss of the penis is not endured without some attempt at compensation. The girl moves by way of a symbolic analogy, one may say- from desire for the penis to desire for a child; her Oedipus complex culminates in the desire, which is long cherished, to be given a child by her father as a present, to bear a child. One has the impression that the Oedipus complex is later gradually abandoned because this wish is never fulfilled. The two desires, to possess a penis and to bear a child, remain powerfully charged with libido in the unconscious and help to prepare the woman's nature for its subsequent sex role. Freud confesses that his insight in the processes of development in the girl is unsatisfying, shadowy and incomplete.

Freud concludes his article by affirming that he has no doubt that the temporal and causal relations described between the Oedipus- complex, sexual intimidation ( the threat of castration), formation of the super- ego and advent of the latency period are of a typical kind, but he does not maintain that this type is the only possible one. Variations in the sequence and the linking up of these processes are very significant in the development of the individual.

Jung, a former collaborator of Freud, and later his challenger, also treats of the Oedipus complex in his work **Freud and Psychoanalysis** (151-155) .

In the chapter devoted to the Oedipus complex, Jung asserts that the fantasies of adults are, in so far as they are conscious, immensely varied and take the most strongly individual forms. It is therefore impossible to give a general description of them. But it is very different when he enters by means of analysis into the world of unconscious fantasies.

The diversity of the fantasy material is indeed very great, but we do not find nearly so many individual peculiarities as in the conscious realm. Unconsciously recurring in these fantasies are ideas which are variations of those found in religion and mythology. Jung thinks that this fact is so striking that he may say that he has discovered in these fantasies the forerunners of religious and mythological ideas.

In his book **Symbols of Transformation** [21], Jung furnishes adequate examples and provides many details. In this work he mentions that the central symbol of Christianity- sacrifice- plays an important role in the fantasies of the unconscious. The Viennese school (Freud ) knows this phenomenon under the ambiguous name of "castration complex". This paradoxical use of the term follows from the special attitude of the Viennese school towards the question of sexuality, which Jung discusses earlier in the above mentioned work. Jung reminds the reader that this is merely a passing reference and prefers to say in a child's unconscious the fantasies are much simpler, as if scaled to the child's milieu. The so- called Oedipus complex is a frequent fantasy. But this term, too, seems a most unsuitable one. Jung recalls the tragic fate of Oedipus which consisted in his marrying his mother and slaying his father. This tragic conflict of adult life appears far removed from the psyche of a child, and to the layman it seems quite inconceivable that a child should suffer from this conflict. But with a little reflection, it will become clear that this comparison lies precisely in the narrow restriction of the fate of Oedipus to his two parents. To that extent Oedipus is the exponent of an infantile conflict magnified to adult proportion. The term "Oedipus complex" naturally does not mean conceiving this conflict

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[21] This book is quoted in Jung's work ,"**Freud and Psychoanalysis**",152 , line 343.

is in its adult form, but rather on a reduced scale suitable to childhood. All it means, in effect, is that the childish demands for love are directed to mother and father, and to the extent that these demands have already attained a certain degree of intensity, so that the object is jealously defended, one can speak of an "Oedipus Complex"( Jung: 152 ).

Jung, in defining the Oedipus complex, assumes a position similar to Freud's, as he says that the weakening and reduction of the Oedipus complex should not be understood as a diminution of the total sum of affection, but as indicating a smaller share of sexual affection in adults. The little son would like to have his mother all to himself and to be rid of his father. As we know, small children can sometimes force themselves between the parents in a most jealous way. In the unconscious, these wishes and intentions assume a more concrete and more drastic form. Children are small primitive creatures and are therefore quite ready to kill (Jung :154) - a thought which is all the easier in the unconscious, because the unconscious is wont to express itself very dramatically. But as a child is, in general, harmless, this seemingly dangerous wish is as a rule harmless, too, as his intention to murder is not at all dangerous. The same is true of his Oedipal intention towards the mother. The faint hints of this fantasy in the child's consciousness can easily be overlooked; most parents are therefore convinced that their children have no Oedipus complex. Parents, like lovers, are mostly blind. Jung thinks that Freud argues that the Oedipus complex is in the first place only a formula for childish desires in regard to the parents and for the conflict which these desires evoke- as every selfish desire must- and as such the matter may seem more acceptable.

The history of the Oedipus fantasy is of special interest because it teaches us a great deal about the development of unconscious fantasies in general. People usually

think that the Oedipus complex is the problem of the son. But this, remarkably enough, is an illusion. Under certain conditions, the sexual libido reaches its final differentiation, corresponding to the sex of the individual, only relatively late in puberty. Before this time it has a sexually undifferentiated character, which can also be termed as bisexual. It is therefore not surprising if little girls have an Oedipus complex too. As is common knowledge, the first love of a child, regardless of sex, belongs to the mother. If the love for the mother is intense at this stage, the father is jealously kept away as a rival. Of course, for the child itself, the mother at this early stage of childhood has no sexual significance worth mentioning, and to that extent the term "Oedipus Complex" is not really suitable. At this period the mother still has the significance of a protecting, enfolding, nourishing being, who for this reason is a source of pleasure.

Jung does not identify the feeling of pleasure in itself with sexuality. Sexuality has an increasingly small share in pleasure-sensations the further back we go in childhood. Nevertheless, jealousy can play a large role, for it too is something that does not belong entirely to the sexual sphere, since the desire for food has itself much to do with the first stirrings of jealousy- one has only to think of animals. This element gains in strength as the years go on, so that the Oedipus complex assumes its classical form. The conflict takes on a more masculine and therefore more typical form in a son, whereas a daughter develops a specific liking for the father, with a corresponding jealous attitude towards the mother.

Jung calls this the Electra Complex .* As everyone knows, Electra took vengeance on her mother Clytemnestra for murdering her husband Agamemnon and thus robbing her - Electra- of her beloved father.

Both of these fantasy complexes become more pronounced with increasing maturity, and reach a new stage in the post- pubertal period, when problems arise out of detachment from the parents. This stage is characterized by the symbol of sacrifice. The more sexuality develops, the more it drives the individual away from his family and forces him to achieve independence. But the child has become closely attached to the family by his whole previous history, and especially to his parents, so that it is often only with the greatest difficulty that the growing individual can free himself from his infantile milieu. If he does not succeed in this, the Oedipus ( or Electra ) complex will precipitate a conflict, and then there is the possibility of neurotic disturbances. The libido, already sexually developed, pours into the Oedipal "mould" and gives rise to feelings or fantasies which prove beyond doubt the effectiveness of the complex, which till then had been unconscious and more or less inoperative.

The first consequence is the formation of intense resistance against the "immoral" impulses stemming from the now active complex. This affects the conscious behavior in two ways. Either the consequences are direct, in which case the son displays

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* Jung created the term "Electra complex" based on Freud's notion of the Oedipus Complex., the only difference is that in the Electra complex the little girl is in love with her father while in the Oedipus complex the little boy is in love with the mother. The first time Jung mentions and defines the Electra Complex is in his work **Freud and Psychoanalysis** , paragraph 347, page 154 .

violent resistance against his father and a particularly affectionate and dependent attitude towards his mother; or they are indirect, that is to say compensated: instead of resistance to the father there is marked submissiveness coupled with an irritated, antagonistic attitude towards the mother. Direct and compensated consequences can sometimes alternate. All this is true also of the Electra complex. If the sexual libido were to become fused in this form, the Oedipus and Electra conflict would lead to murder and incest. This naturally does not happen with normal people, nor in so- called "amoral" primitive communities, otherwise the human race would have perished long ago. On the contrary, it is in the natural order of things that familiar objects lose their compelling charm and force the libido to seek new objects; and this acts as an important regulative factor which prevents parricide and incest. The continuous development of the libido towards objects outside the family is perfectly normal and natural, and it is an abnormal and pathological phenomenon if the libido remains, as it were, glued to the family. Nevertheless, it is a phenomenon that can sometimes be observed in normal people.

Jung concludes this chapter by recalling Freud, when he says that Freud has a special conception of the incest complex which has given rise to heated controversy. Jung thinks that Freud begins with the fact that the Oedipus complex is usually unconscious and he conceives this to be the consequence of a moral repression. According to Freud, the Oedipus complex seems to be repressed, that is, displaced into the unconscious through the reactive effect of conscious tendencies. It almost seems as though the Oedipus complex would rise to consciousness if the child's development were uninhibited and were not affected by cultural influences.

Jung cites Freud in calling the barrier that prevents the acting out of the Oedipus complex the, "incest barrier". He ( Freud ) seems to believe, so far as one can gather from his writings, that the incest barrier is formed by the backwash of experience, that it is a correction by reality, since the unconscious strives for boundless and immediate satisfaction without regard for others. Freud considers that the psychological incest barrier can be compared with the prohibitions against incest found even among primitives. He further considers that these prohibitions are a proof that men really do desire incest, for which reason laws were framed against it even on the primitive level. He therefore takes the tendency towards incest to be an absolutely concrete sexual wish, for he calls this complex the root complex, or nucleus, of neuroses and is inclined, viewing this as the original one, to reduce practically the whole psychology of neuroses, as well as many other phenomena in the realm of the mind, to this complex (Jung:156). Jung accepts Freud's explanation and expands it to his theory of the Electra complex.

One can find great examples in literature which exemplify the theories of Freud and Jung, especially in the Greek tragedies. Both the Oedipus and the Electra complexes are explored in tragic plays, from the tragedians (Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides ) to contemporary playwrights. Sophocles' **Oedipus Rex**; **Agamemnon**'s, **Electra**'s and **Orestes**' stories written by the three Greek tragedians , each with different versions of these myths, and Shakespeare's **Hamlet** and **King Lear** are examples of plays with the Oedipus and the Electra complexes. In modern time, one can cite Giraudoux 's **Electra,** O'Neill's **Mourning Becomes Electra** and and the Brazilian playwright Nelson Rodrigues' play **Senhora dos Afogados**, among others. Evidence of these two complexes are also found in a great amount of fictional pieces, among them it is relevant to cite D.H.

Lawrence's **Sons and Lovers**. Thus, Freud and Jung greatly influenced Western Literature with their theories of the Oedipus and the Electra Complexes.

The critic André Green in his work **The Tragic Effect - The Oedipus Complex in Tragedy** (1968 ) especially acknowledges Freud's influence in a psycho- analytic reading of tragedy. He says that there is a mysterious bond between psychoanalysis and the theater. When Freud cites **King Oedipus, Hamlet** and the **Brothers Karamazov** as the most awe- inspiring works of literature, Green notes that all three are about *Parricide.* For Freud, Sophocles and Shakespeare are geniuses in a class of their own. Especially in Shakespeare, Freud recognized a master whose texts he analyzed as if they were the discoveries of some illustrious precursor. But he seems to have had a special affection for the theater in general because the theater is the best embodiment of the "other scene"- the unconscious.

André Green also mentions Aeschylus and his work the **Oresteia** as application of the Freudian and Jungian views of both the Oedipus and the Electra complexes that he refers to as "The Oedipodeia" ( 34-87 ). These complexes are present not only in Aeschylus' **Oresteia** but in the other tragedies as well ( Sophocles' **Electra** and Euripides' **Electra** and **Orestes** ) . The "oedipodeia" is a tragic cycle in which men should play the more important part, but in the **Oresteia** everything proceeds from the women into a kind of "pre-Oedipal situation" ( the image of the phallic mother, destructive of the paternal penis, the dominance of the mother-son religion, and so on). But the ending of Aeschylus' trilogy shows that the paternal right prevails over maternal right and matricide is not considered a crime if it is used as a vindication for a father's murder. The end of the Areopagus court shows that Orestes, through matricide, has been liberated from maternal

power and is somehow purified into a new birth through the power of the father. André Green thinks that the change of the Oedipus complex to the hands of the women in the **Oresteia** is a way of showing that maternal powers can be as powerful as paternal ones. The proof is found in Athena ( a female goddess who acts like a man ). In fact, Athena has decided in favor of the father, giving the decisive vote when each of the adversaries had an equal number of votes; but by deciding in his, favor the benefit of her veredict puts the party to which she gave her support under a strict obligation to her and to the means by which the case is decided... In a way Athena vindicates Clytemnestra ( a "phallic" woman, acting like a man ) by recovering her own position as authority after having surrendered it, and by virtue of that very action. So all this "oedipodeia" seen by Green in The **Oresteia** and in the other Greek plays that treat the myth of Electra contains respectively both Freud's and Jung's views of the Oedipus and Electra complexes .

**2.4 - Marcuse**

Herbert Marcuse is a philosopher of our time who writes about civilization, in contrast to Freud's liberation of impulses, in his book **Eros and Civilization,** which is based on Freud's notions of psychoanalysis. Marcuse begins his work by stating that Freud's proposition that civilization is based on the permanent subjugation of the human instincts has been taken for granted. His question, whether the suffering thereby inflicted upon individuals has been worth the benefits of culture, has not been taken too seriously- the less so since Freud himself considered the process to be inevitable and irreversible. Free gratification of man's instinctual needs is incompatible with civilized society: renunciation and delay in satisfaction are the prerequisites of progress. "Happiness", said Freud, (Marcuse quotes ) "is no cultural value". Happiness must be subordinated to the discipline of work as a full time occupation, to the discipline of monogamic reproduction, to the established system of law and order. The methodical sacrifice of libido, its rigidly enforced deflection to socially useful activities and expression, is culture.

Marcuse believes that intensified progress seems to be bound up with intensified lack of freedom. Throughout the world of industrial civilization, the domination of man by man is growing in scope and efficiency. Nor does this trend appear as an incidental, transitory regression on the road to progress. The most effective subjugation and destruction of man by man takes place at the height of civilization, when the material and intellectual attainments of mankind seem to allow the creation of a truly free world (Marcuse: 4).

These negative aspects of present- day culture may well indicate the obsolescence of established institutions and the emergence of new forms of civilization:

repressiveness is perhaps the more vigourously maintained the more unnecessary it becomes. If it must indeed belong to the essence of civilization as such, then Freud's question as to the price of civilization would be meaningless.

Marcuse takes up Freud 's discussion of a non- repressive civilization and believes that the discussion is justified on two concrete and realistic grounds: first, Freud's theoretical conception itself seems to refute his consistent denial of the historical possibility of a non- repressive civilization, and, second, the very achievements of a repressive civilization seem to create the pre-conditions for the gradual abolition of repression. *

Marcuse takes the concept of man which comes from Freudian theory, and considers it as the most irrefutable indictment of Western Civilization- and at the same time the most unshakable defense of this civilization. According to Freud, the history of man is the history of his repression. Culture constrains not only his societal but also his biological existence, not only parts of the human being but his instinctual structure itself. However, such constraint is the very pre-condition of progress. Left free to pursue their natural objectives, the basic instincts of man would be incompatible with all lasting association and preservation: they would destroy even when they unite. The uncontrolled

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* Marcuse explains some of the terms he uses in his book **Eros and Civilization:**

- "Civilization "is used interchangeably with "culture "as in Freud's" Civilization and its Discontents "
- "Repression"and "Repressive"are used in the non-technical sense to designate both conscious and unconscious, external and internal processes of restraint, constraint and suppression.
- "Instinct", in accordance with Freud's notion of *Trieb*, refers to primary "drives "of the human organism which are subject to historical modification; they find mental as well as somatic representation.

Eros is just as fatal as his deadly counterpart,the death instinct ( Thanatos ). Their destructive force derives from the fact that they strive for gratification as an end in itself, at any moment. The instincts must therefore be deflected from their goal, inhibited in their aim. Civilization begins when the primary objective - namely, integral satisfaction of needs- is effectively renounced ( Marcuse: 12 ).

The reality which shapes the instincts as well as the needs and satisfactions of man is a socio-historical world. The animalistic man becomes a human being only through a fundamental transformation of his nature, affecting not only his instinctual aims but also his instinctual "values", that is, the principles that govern the attainment of his aims.

Freud described the change or transformation of the *pleasure principle* into the *reality principle*. The interpretation of the " mental apparatus " in terms of these two principles is basic to Freud's theory and remains so in spite of all the modifications of the dualistic conception. It corresponds largely (but not entirely) to the distinction between conscious and unconscious processes and principles . The difference between the two dimensions is a genetic - historical as well as a structural one. The unrestrained pleasure principle comes into conflict with the natural and human environment. The individual comes to the traumatic realization that full and painless gratification of his needs/urges is impossible ( Freud , **Collected Papers**: 18 ).

Marcuse thinks, based on Freud, that the reality principle has to be re- established continually in the development of man. This fact indicates that its triumph over the pleasure principle is never complete and never totally secure. In the Freudian conception, civilization does not once and for all terminate a "state of nature". What civilization masters and represses - the claim of the pleasure principle- continues to exist in civilization

itself. The struggle against freedom reproduces itself in the psyche of man, in the form of self-repression , and this self- repression in turn sustains his masters and their institutions. It is these mental dynamics which Freud reveals as the dynamics of civilization.

Freud, Jung, and Marcuse close the circle of psychoanalytic approach to myth; Freud and Jung in their study of the Oedipus complex and Marcuse in his psycho-sociological and historical study of Freud 's ideas in relation to civilization versus unrepressed instincts so well explained in Nietzsche. These scholars ( Eliade, Lévi Strauss, Freud, Jung, Marcuse and later Nietzsche and Barthes ), each in their own field are important to the subject (the treatment of myth and the Electra complex in both the Greek playwrights and in O'Neill's particular play in study **Mourning Becomes Electra** ) of the present dissertation.

## 2.5 Nietszhe

In Nietzsche's **The Birth of Tragedy**, the development of art is the result of a constant interplay between two contending elements in the creative life of man: *the Apollonian and the Dionysian*. Apollo, the god of prophecy and patron of the arts and Dionysus, the god of wine and the vineyards. Nietzsche views these two mythical figures as the personification of opposing creative tendencies in man. By constant opposition, each stimulates the other to further effort, and the result is the growth of art. But the two tendencies also have a certain dependency upon one another, and in the Greek Tragedy, a balance of the two tendencies is achieved.

Nietzsche begins **The Birth of Tragedy** by asking questions concerning Greek art, inquiring why the most universally envied race of mankind needed tragedy .

> I gave definite form to the **Birth of Tragedy** out of the Spirit of Music. Out of Music? Music and Tragedy? Greeks and the music of Tragedy? Greeks and the pessimistic art form? The most accomplished, most beautiful, most universally envied race of mankind, those most capable of seducing us into life- they were the ones who needed tragedy? Or even more- Art? What for? Greek Art? (Nietzsche, F. **The Birth of Tragedy**. England, Penguin Books, 1993, 3)

Nietzsche continues asking questions about Greek art and the role of pessimism which it evidences; he also questions whether this pessimism is a sign of strength or weakness:

> Is there a pessimism of strength? An intellectual predilection for what is hard, terrible, evil, problematic in existence, arising from well - being, overflowing health, the abundance of existence? Is it perhaps possible to

> suffer from over abundance? A tempting and challenging, sharp- eyed courage that craves the terrible as one craves the enemy, the worthy enemy, against whom it can test its strength?... What is the meaning, for those Greeks of the best, strongest, most courageous age, of the tragic myth? And of the tremendous phenomenon of the Dionysiac? And of the tragedy that was born from it? (Nietzsche, **B.T**: 3- 4 )

Historically, tragedy began with the chorus alone, the acting out of the drama being added later. Nietzsche finds in this structure a clue to his interpretation of tragedy as a blending of the Apollonian and Dionysian forces. Nietzsche rejects certain other ideas regarding the function of the chorus, for example, that it is a reflection of a desire for constitutional democracy, or that the chorus represents an "ideal spectator".

Nietzsche explains his view by means of his two - fold conception of art. The chorus, he suggests, is that Dionysian force which generates the imagery upon the stage. The formal stage play becomes seen, through the eyes of the chorus, as an Apollonian interpretation of the reality which the chorus symbolizes for the spectator. The chorus affords the spectator the opportunity to enter into the selfless condition of a multitude, without identifying with the action.

The myths of Apollo and Dionysus are, throughout the **Birth of Tragedy**, two important concepts, necessary to the understanding of Greek Tragedy. The Apollonian tendency is closely related to *dreaming*. Dreaming, says Nietzsche, is a means of interpreting life through images. The dreamer- the image maker - takes a deep delight in the myriad forms and shapes of the dream images which are not perceived by the intellect, but by the artistic ( aesthetic ) sense. An essential part of the experience of dreams is an ever present realization that the images are not real but illusory.

The two gods used by Nietzsche to define tragedy and human existence, Apollo and Dionysus, are defined by Nietzsche and each is associated to a different kind of art. Apollo represents the arts in which images are deliberately produced as an interpretation of existence- especially in plastic arts ( painting and sculpture ). Thus the Apollonian tendency is the tendency to impose form and order upon the world. Concerning Apollo Nietzsche also believes that he represents a principle of individuation in man. Dionysus, on the other hand, represents the destruction of individuality. Physical intoxication is analogous to the "glorious" transport of Dionysian rapture. The Dionysiac state is one in which the boundaries between individuals are destroyed. In this state, a sense of mystical unity with the universe is experienced. The universe itself is seen as one, as a unity, a one. Seized by the Dionysian spirit, the individual abandons the social veneer of intellectual rules and "forgets himself completely". Dionysus thus represents the overpowering urges of a primitive response to life ( seen in Freud and in Marcuse ), an uninhibited, free and direct communion with the deep mysteries of nature which defy formal understanding and to which all images stand opposed as an Apollonian illusion to the Dionysian reality:

> To the two gods of art, Apollo and Dionysus, we owe our recognition that in the Greek world there is a tremenduous opposition, as regards both origins and aims, between the Apollonian art of the sculptor and the non-visual, Dionysiac art of music. These two very different tendencies walk side by side, usually in violent opposition to one another, perpetuating the struggle of the opposition only apparently bridged by the word "art"; until finally, by a metaphysical miracle of the "Hellenic will", the two seem to be coupled, and in this coupling they seem at last to beget the work of art that is Dionysiac as it is Apollonian.( Nietzsche, **B. T.** : 14 )

Through the musical Dionysian force, Greek Myth was transformed; in drama,

(especially in tragedy ), myth assumed a higher meaning and came to express the Dionysian world of Silenus. The hero of the tragic stage represents the god Dionysus; the suffering of the hero is a symbolic form, which is represented by the god's momentary dramatic form.

The Dionysian wisdom has a positive side: the anticipation of a return to the original "oneness" of the Universe. In Dionysus, there is the knowledge that all existence is one and that separation of the one into individuals is an evil. Art, Nietzsche says, is the symbol of the hope that Dionysus will return.

To clarify the meaning of Nietzsche's main notions in **The Birth of Tragedy**- the Apollonian and the Dionysian - is not an easy matter. Speaking of them as "gods" is a strong literary device, but it does not aid our understanding. For example, how can one tell if a particular work of art possesses or not a "balance" (a union of Apollonian and Dionysian forces) of the two factors? It is not at all clear whether the "Dionysian"and the "Apollonian" are things located in the work of art ( as are the form and the matter of the work), or in the artist's method, or in his goals or in the effect. These questions are not well answered in **The Birth of Tragedy.**

Nietzsche concludes his book by defending that tragedy is born again and again out of music ( especially in Richard Wagner's music ), and that the decline of true music is the decline of tragedy as well. He affirms earlier in the book that music is linked to Dionysus and is opposed to Apollo ( plastic arts ). Music is independent from concept and it symbolizes a sphere which is both prior to appearance and beyond it. Language, on the other hand, is the instrument of Apollo and of the intellect. It cannot tolerate contradictions and thus never succeeds fully in imitating the spirit of music. Both music

and images are abstract but music is an abstract expression of "the heart of man". Concepts and images, on the other hand, are abstract forms of perception. Only music can give deep significance to image. If the spirit of music is distorted by misguided attempts to imitate the outer world of perception, the significance of art is lost.

Nietzsche in **The Birth of Tragedy** seeks a justification for existence, or a new basis for ultimate values, as it is to be found in art and in the continual renewal of art. Although this is a theme which he later rejected, the problem which led to it - the problem of justification of values in the absence of religion or of ultimate knowledege - dominated his thought to the very end. His thoughts set the stage in many ways for the unfolding of modern thought.

Here one can recall Marcuse, when he mentions Nietzsche's view of attaining the Nirvana in the world, especially in relation to Nietzsche's valorization of Wagner's music.(Marcuse : 119 - 122) But Nietzsche thinks that in spite of music, human beings are still prisoners of the repressive world: "Will - this is the liberation and joybringer: thus I taught you, my friends! But now this will also learn: the Will itself is still a prisoner!" (Nietzsche, **Also Spake Zarathustra**, Part II, **The Portable Nietzsche**: 251 ).

Marcuse views Nietzsche as a critic of Western Civilization for the latter considers it a gigantic fallacy. The more efficacy civilization attains, the more is found a growing degeneration of the life instincts which mark the decline of man. But Nietzsche envisages a "closed circle", an "eternal return"( seen in Eliade ); Eternity becomes present in the here and now: "All things pass, all things return; eternally turns the wheel of being. All things die, all things blossom again, eternal is the year of Being... In each now, being begins; Here turns the sphere of Time. The center is everywhere. Bent is the path of

eternity" (Nietzsche, **A. S. Z.**, Part III, 329 - 330 ).

Nietzsche envisages the eternal return of the finite exactly as it is- in its full concreteness and finiteness. This is the total affirmation of the life instincts, repelling all escape and negation. The eternal return is the will and vision of an erratic attitude toward being for which necessity and fulfillment coincide. For Nietzsche, the liberation of man depends on the reversal of the sense of guilt; mankind must come to associate the bad conscience not with the affirmation but with the denial of life instincts, not with rebellion but with the acceptance of the repressive ideals.

The scholars seen so far, with the exception of Lévi - Strauss, share some common views and approaches to myth. Freud and Jung speak about the repressed instincts and of the unconscious feelings resultant from the repressed "free" feelings- especially the form adopted to escape from repression and castration - the Oedipus Complex. Marcuse and Nietzsche agree as to man's necessity to find a union (in spite of "civilization" which "destroys" man), between Eros and Thanatos, between Apollo and Dionysus in order to "accept" repression without feeling himself a prisoner, but rather a liberated and free being. Marcuse, Nietzsche and Eliade speak of the "eternal return", a finding of eternity, a renewal of the primordial happening in man's constant present day existence. All of these scholars' views on myth are relevant to the myth in study in this dissertation, especially the Electra myth explored in Eugene O'Neill's **Mourning Becomes Electra** .

## 2.6 - Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes's approach to myth is also important to the subject of this dissertation, even though his structural approach is in a way distanced from the anthropological, psychoanalytic and philosophical approaches seen in the previous pages of this work.

Barthes' s work has gone through many phases. He has been an existentialist, a Marxist, a structuralist, a linguist and a textual critic; and he has combined sociology with literary criticism. He has rejected every kind of systematization., so that sociologists cannot deal with him easily, and he himself frequently refers to his own sociology without using customary sociological terms. Barthes, nevertheless, attempts to uncover the relation between thought and society, his characteristic "method" being to focus on the language found in texts. But Barthes goes much beyond texts to find irrational and illogical connections: he free- associates and creates words and meanings to embroider on both the texts and on what presumably lies behind them. He wants to expose all the false notions and ideologies. And for a while he attempted to construct a comprehensive frame capable of integrating all past and future creative acts and works through the use of language in writing. Barthes is somewhat of an enigma ( Kuzweil : 164 ) .

Barthes's works must be read in the language of symbol and sign, beyond textualization, using a kind of myth which is inserted in society and in ideologies. Two of his works best prove this, **Elements of Semiology** and **Mythologies** . In the **Elements of Semiology**, his emerging semiology for literary structuralism, the author intends to conceptualize total language experience ( *la langue moins parole* ) by interpreting every

sign associated with spoken and written language. But because signs also transmit capitalist ideology, he has to "demythologize" both the language and its message along with the dialectal relationship between customary language usage and the specific use of a word. He begins this work by inserting every writer into his language ( this means into his social milieu ) to account for his haphazard ( though not arbitrary ) choice of words.

In **Mythologies,** Barthes focuses on hidden ( and unconscious ) messages by the mass media that promote capitalist ideologies. He attacks not only the myths of the right but also those of the "established" left. Unmasking all ideologies to destroy their effectiveness, Barthes discovers that both capitalist and revolutionary languages perpetuate their own myths. Barthes' s devastating irony moved from bourgeois history to the identification of bourgeois man, from tautology to "neither norism" as verbal devices, from the qualification of quality to the love of proverbs.

In **Mythologies**, Barthes asks what myth means nowadays, and he defines it as a "kind of speech" ( "Myth Today"- **A Barthes Reader**: 93 ). But this speech is not just any type, since language needs special conditions in order to become myth. Myth is a system of communication, that is, a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea. It is rather a mode of signification, a form.

Barthes continues to associate myth with language, speech and form as he says: "Since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message: there are formal limits to myth. Everything can be a myth, for the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions" (ibid: 94 ). Every object in the world can pass from a closed , silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking

about things.

Barthes thinks that myth exists in function of history. One can conceive of very ancient myths , but there are no eternal ones; for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and death of mythical language. Ancient or not, mythology can only have a historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the "nature" of things.

Myth in Barthes is a semiological system. Since mythology is the study of a type of speech, it is but one fragment of this vast science of signs which Saussure postulated under the name of Semiology. Barthes refers to psychoanalysis ( Freud, Jung ), structuralism (Lévi-Strauss ) and some new types of literary criticism that are no longer concerned with facts except inasmuch as they are endowed with significance. Barthes says that to postulate a signification is to have recourse to semiology.

Taking from Saussure the system of the sign with signifier and signified, Barthes uses it in literature and in explaining myth. Literature as discourse forms a signifier, and the relation between crisis and discourse defines the work, which is a signification. Of course this tri -dimensional pattern, however constant in its form, is actualized in different ways: one cannot therefore say too often that semiology can have its unity only at the level of form, not content; its field is limited, it knows only one operation: reading and deciphering.

In myth, according to Barthes, one finds the tri- dimensional pattern: the signifier, the signified and the sign. But myth is a peculiar system in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second order semiological system. That which is a sign (namely the associative total of concept and image ) in the first system

becomes a mere signifier in the second. The materials of mythical speech ( the language itself, philosophy, painting, rituals, objects etc ), however different at the start , are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught up by myth. Myth sees in them only the same raw materials: their unity is that they are all reduced to the status of mere language.

So in Barthes, myth is language, speech, form. It corresponds to the Greek word *mythos* (something uttered, a tale, a statement.Through his approach to myth, Barthes, as well as Marcuse and Nietzsche, tries to find a way of union between the world and man: "This is what we must seek: a reconciliation between reality and men, between description and explanation, between object and knowledge"( Ibid: 149 ).

Barthes also ( as do Nietzsche and Marcuse ) attempts to find the liberation of man in his search for truth by extending literature to the "creative spirit", beyond what is known, dealing with the imaginary: "the existential force which through symbols and signs tries to gain possession of the widest experience that man undergoes... evoking emotions of the future and of freedom" (**Barthes by Barthes,** New York, Hill and Wang, 1977, 18).

With these different approaches to myth, one can continue the discussion of Greek versus Modern Tragedy in Eugene O'Neill based on ancient myths, on the various approaches to myth, and on Aristotle's view of tragedy as explained in his work, the **Poetics**.

## 3 - Aristotle's Poetics and Tragedy

In order to establish the debate between Greek and Modern Tragedy, one needs to go back to tragedy in its origin, in its ancient form and in Aristotle's concept of tragedy which is the starting point for the study of this genre. This section is dedicated to the study of the genre of tragedy based on Aristotle's **Poetics**. But before entering into the explanation and concepts of tragedy according to Aristotle in his **Poetics**, one must look more deeply into the origin of tragedy itself.

The genre of tragedy originated in the dithyramb, a choral song accompanied by the flute, sung ceremonially in honor of the god Dionysus. It has been conjectured that the participants wore goat skins and pretended to be satyrs. If true, this would account for the term "tragedy" ( *Tragoidia* =Trágos = Goat + Oidé = Song ) which means goat- song. Latin has the word *tragoedia* and from this language one has all the other variations, as for example "tragédia" in Portuguese and "tragedy" in English.

In the "goat –song" sung in honor of the god Dionysus, at a certain point, it is thought, the leader of the chorus, the *coryphaeus*, a certain Thespis, added to the chorus an "answerer" (hypocrites) with whom he carried on a dialogue. *Hypokrités* became the Greek word for "actor" . It is for this reason that Thespis is usually credited by historians of the theater with the invention of tragedy. Aeschylus ( 524? - 406 B. C. ) added later the second actor to the chorus and Sophocles ( 495 - 405 B. C. ) added the third. This was the extent of the Greek cast in a tragedy. Presumably there were never more than three masked characters on the stage at once.

Historically one may say that while there is, as far as we have knowledge, no

certainty as to the origin of tragedy. However, there is little doubt that originally, there was a close relation between tragedy and the Dionysian ritual. It has been amply demonstrated that Dionysus was a year spirit, or a god of vegetation. But the tragic hero is never Dionysus, and it is only in **The Bacchae** of Euripides that we are afforded an actual glimpse of the god's role in the Bacchic sacrifice.

The Greek plays, in any event, were performed in Athens at the Great Dionysian cult in early spring, and at the Lenae, the festival of wine vats, in January; and throughout Greece at the Rustic Dionysia in December. In the great Spring festival, the entire urban population came to the theater at the slope of the Acropolis. The plays were given in the form of contest. Three poets were chosen early to compete on each of three consecutive days, and normally each presented a trilogy of plays on related themes, followed by a satyr play, lighter in tone, the four together forming a tetralogy.

Tragedy comes from the early period of the Greek drama, and in this type of drama the principal element of the production was the unmasked chorus. The number of the chorus components is rigorously constant, twelve in Aeschylus, fifteen in Sophocles and in Euripides. The number of verse lines may be free but the size of the chorus should keep a pattern. In many plays the chorus is deeply concerned with the action. Where it is not, it creates an emotional climate for the play, reacting to the deeds of the principal characters in a manner that may be thought to approximate the feelings of the audience, defining a prudent standard of behavior that gives scale to the action, and commenting sententiously on what it is done. The chorus does provide a norm by which to judge the action. Against this background of unremarkable people, singularly articulate, to whom nothing happens, the remarkable people of the drama move through their extraordinary

course. Another important fact related to the chorus is that through the chorus the "oral language" is distinguished from the "elocution language" ( destined exclusively to the characters ): the chorus sings in the doric dialect while the actors / characters speak in the attic dialect .

The theatrical practice of the Greeks is fairly clear. All parts were played by men. The actors wore masks. They sang certain lyric passages, either by themselves or with the aid of the chorus. In tragedy they walked about on high clogs and wore long gowns and lofty headdresses. They played their parts on a low platform, raised slightly above the circular area (*orkhéstra* ) in which the chorus danced, and were thus exalted by a foot or more above the common run of humanity.

Greek tragedy was strongly influenced by the conception of a contract of order and stability in which gods, human society and nature all participated. An act of aggression (Greek *hybris* ) throws this cosmic machinery out of gear and hence it must make a countermovement to right itself. This countermovement usually called *Nemesis* is often referred to as fate which is the recovery of the lost order through the inevitability of the tragic action.

In Greek Tragedy, three main themes are present. One is the theme of isolation according to which a character of greater than ordinary human proportion becomes isolated from the community. Mortal heroes of divine ancestry, like many Greek heroes, must discover the limitations of humanity. If they are gods, like Aeschylus ' Prometheus, they are isolated by the power of a much stronger god, Zeus. Then there is the theme of the violation and reestablishment of order in which the neutralization of the violent act may take the form of a revenge. Finally a character may emboby a passion for forbidden

sexual love (Ex: incestuous love ). This latter theme is more conspicuous in Euripides' **Hippolytus**. The three themes appear together and / or in turns. One does not exclude the other and all are intimately related ( Frye:190)

Tragedy had its origins in Ancient Greece and is characterized by the identification that is established between the spectator and the problem presented through the action that occurs on the stage. In the Greek theater the spectator, through a kind of empathy, suffers the tension that comes from the play. When the tension is over, the public reaches a *kátharsis* ( to be explained in the Aristotle's section ) which can be translated as purification, purgation, cleansing or clarification (Janko, in Rorty: 342 ). This catharsis liberates all the emotion suffered during the performance.

The tragic universe can be conceived as a kind of crisis whose central point is ambiguity. This happens because tragedy is the result of an ambiguous world with two opposing forces: the mythic and the rational. Myth, in its original form, provided answers without ever explicitly formulating the problem. When tragedy takes over the mythical traditions, it uses them to pose problems to which there are no solutions.

The question of the religious and the mythic forces is intimately linked to the economic, social and political history of Greece. Tragedy comes from these two forces, the mythic and the religious, and Greek mythology is largely explored by the tragedians in their plays. Hence, in order to study tragedy, it is necessary to know the religious practice nd the myths adopted by the Greek people of that time ( the myths were already mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation ).[22]

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[22]The following paragraphs are based on the book **A Tragédia ( Estrutura e História )** written by Lígia Militz da Costa and Maria Luiza Ritzel Remédios.

The Greek official religion was Olympic, which was organized like a big family . This religion favored mythology which has been widely used by ancient and modern literature. Polyteist, the Olympic religion was constituted by gods, heroes, semigods who were submitted to the *Moira* (destiny) and to *Anánke ( necessity)*. As a consequence, the Greeks, adherents of the Olympic religion, had a relative conception of destiny ( Moira ) and necessity (Anánke ). Their gods were immortal , but did not have power to modify the happenings of the world.

The notions of Moira ( destiny ) and Anánke ( necessity) present the human destiny as immutable and show the Cosmos as something organized with which one can not interfere. If any kind of interference should happen, *Khaós* would be installed. The principal characteristic of tragedy as a literary genre is centered especially on the relation that is established between these two elements.

The Greek official religion was also aristocratic and in a way reproduced the feudal order, but this was not an impediment for the existence of other more popular cults connected to the forces of nature. One can mention among these cults the mysteries of Eleusis, the cults to Dionysus, and Orphism. Among the cults that existed parallel to the official religion of Greece, the Dionysian was the most important one for the formation of tragedy, especially in its characteristic a great popular, collective feast, where Dionysus was worshipped four times a year by its abundance of earth, milk, wine and honey. * During these feasts there were dances and dithyrambic chant that would give a lyric character to the cult and this characteristic remained in the genre of tragedy. All these

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* The Dionysian myth is always a myth of fertilization , of renewal .

cults were anterior to the Olympic religion and the mixture of different religious tendencies served as the background for the birth of tragedy as an art form.

Through myth, the Greek poets of tragedy revealed and discussed the Greek moral, religious and philosophical problems. Considering that the Greek world was supported by a struggle between the mythical and the rationalistic díke ( justice ), tragedy appears as a literary genre which emerged from the struggle between these two kinds of justice. Vernant in his work **Mito e Tragédia na Grécia Antiga I ( Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece )** says that:

> O momento da tragédia é pois, aquele em que se abre, no coração da experiência social, uma distância bastante grande para que, entre o pensamento jurídico e social de um lado e as tradições míticas e heróicas de outro, as oposições se delineiem claramente; bastante curta, entretanto, para que os conflitos de valor sejam ainda dolorosamente sentidos e para que o confronto não deixe de efetuar-se.[23]

Junito Brandão, in his book **Teatro Grego - Tragédia e Comédia** ( chapter I- **Tragédia Grega:** 9-15 ), says that in Greece all the religious trends had a common basis, which was their "thirst" for contemplative knowledge ( *gnosis* ), the purification of the will in order to receive the divine (*enthousiasmós* ) and liberation ( *kátharsis*) from this life generator, which is made up of births and deaths, to a life of immortality ( *athanasia* ). But this same nostalgic "thirst" for immortality, commended by the extremely popular and

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[23] Translation: "The moment of tragedy is , therefore , that moment when, in the depths of social experience , a big distance is open , so that oppositions are clearly defined between the judicial and social thought on the one hand , and the mythic and heroic traditions on the other . Yet , that distance is short enough to make the conflicts concerning values be acutely felt and to give birth to confrontation " ( Vernant's **Mito e Tragédia na Grécia Antiga** : 17).

naturalistic myths of vegetation divinities who die and resurrect (especially in the myth of Dionysus ), conflicted violently with the official and aristocratic religion of the *polis* in which the Olympic gods were always on guard in order to destroy any kind of "démésure" (excessiveness) from the poor mortals that would aspire to immortality. Both the Olympic gods and the State would feel threatened by this "démésure", as the "*homo dionysiacus*", integrated in Dionysus, through ecstasy and enthusiasm was liberated from certain conditionings and prohibitions in the ethic, political and social order. As an example, in Ancient Greece there existed some kind of "warning", advising people to have moderation - *"meden ágan"* , which means "nothing in excess" (Brandão:11)

The worshippers of Dionysus, after their vertiginous dances, used to pass out. In this state, they believed they had been removed from themselves by the process of "εχστασιζ "(ecstasy). This coming out of one's self through a surpassing of the human condition would imply a "dive" into Dionysus and of the god into his worship by the process of enthusiasm. The simple mortal man "ánthropos", in ecstasy and enthusiasm, thus has a share of immortality, and thus becomes "anér", that is a "hero", someone that has surpassed the "métron", of his determined measure. Having surpassed the "métron" the "anér" is indeed a "hypokrités", that is one that responds in ecstasy and enthusiasm, the actor, one other.

This surpassing of the métron by the "hypokrités" is one's "démésure", one's "hybris", that is , a violence done to oneself and to the mortal gods, which provokes divine jealousy. The "anér" ( the actor and hero) then becomes a victim of the gods. Punishment comes immediately, the gods throw against the hero "até", the blindness of reason; everything that the "hypokrités" does, will turn against himself (Oedipus for example ).

Any other movement, and the claws of "*Moira*", or blind destiny, will surround him.

So tragedy occurs only when the "métron" is surpassed, when all the "démésures" occur. It is for this reason that the Greek state took this form of religious acting and transformed it into an appendix to the political religion of the "Polis".

The tragic genre has four particular characteristics: a) the use of a mask that is the essence of the dramatic representation ( mimesis ), b) metamorphosis, c) the choir representing the collectivity of the citizens, and d) the tragic hero who reduplicates the religious, political and aristocratic values questioned at the time. The articulation between the human and the divine in tragedy justifies the conflict between rational and mythical thought , which demonstrates that the domain of tragedy lies where human acts are articulated with the gods.

Another characteristic of the tragic genre is the ambiguity resultant from the shock between *éthos* and *dáimon*, since in tragedy the tragic hero wants to be guided by his own character ( éthos ), but he is subordinated to forces exterior to his will and to the evil genius (*dáimon*). Another characteristic of tragedy is the terrifying happening: the parricide (or matricide, or infanticide) the incest and the regicide .

Tragedy is defined as a serious kind of fiction, involving the downfall of a hero or heroine. It appeared as an aesthetic creation capable of performing on stage facts and myths of real and fictional life, well known to the Greeks (Frye:195 ). The concept of the tragic has been examined and debated by the philosophers not only as a form of art, but also in relation to human existence in general, or to the world scene. The starting point for these debates is almost always the Aristotelian definition of tragedy. According to the philosopher,

> Tragedy, then, is a process of imitating an action which has serious implications, is complete, and possesses magnitude; by means of language which has been made sensuously attractive, with each of its varieties found separately in the parts; enacted by the persons themselves and not presented through narrative; through a course of pity and fear completing the purification of tragic acts which have those emotional characteristics. (**Poetics**, 9: 25 )

In the **Poetics,** one finds the main Aristotelian terms important for the understanding of tragedy. Plot, for Aristotle, is the most important element in tragedy (the arrangement or structuring of the incidents), as he says in Section 10:

> The greatest of these elements is the structuring of the incidents. For tragedy is an imitation not of men, but of a life, of an action... Thus the structure of events, the plot is the goal of tragedy and the goal is the greatest thing of all. Again: a tragedy cannot exist without a plot, but it can without characters. (**Poetics,** 10:10 )

Aristotle considers Plot as the key element in tragedy because "plot imitates an Action". He places central emphasis on action and plot. Plots are artifacts constructed by the tragic poets within constraints of a kind of realism, of an intended representation of actions. He is certainly aware of the poet's creative role in plot construction. According to Aristotle's definition, tragedy "imitates an action", but it does so in ways that are more complex and abstract than is usually recognized, or than Aristotle seems to have recognized. Tragedy is a multimedia art, but Aristotle regards it first and foremost as a verbal art, the art of constructing or writing the plot .

In the structuring of events plot should be unified "since it is both the basic and the most important element in the tragic art" ( 10:29). Aristotle understands that the imitation should be complete and whole. The term "whole" he understands as:

> ... that which has beginning, middle and end. Beginning is that which does not necessarily follow on something else, but after it something else naturally is or happens; "end", the other way round, is that which naturally follows on something else, either necessarily or for the most part, but nothing else on it; and "middle" that which naturally follows on something else and something else on it. So then, well- constructed plots should neither begin nor end at any chance point but follow the guidelines just laid down. (**Poetics** 10:30 )

This unification of plot or the unity of plot which was emphasized in the Renaissance sustains the idea that the action in a tragic play should be "unified and complete" and it should not exceed the limit of twenty four hours. Thus in the name of verisimilitude two other "rules" were added in the Renaissance in relation to the compactness of the tragic plays.: the unity of place and unity of time. This meant that the action of a tragedy must take place on a single day and in a single place, and must converge upon a single event. In fact most Greek tragedies, though by no means all, conform to this scheme, and the consequence is a tightly knit story, the enactment of which entails a lengthy exposition and the services of messengers to describe what happened before. Aristotle requires this compactness in the section (number 11) called "General principles of the Tragic Plots":

> A poetic imitation, then, ought to be unified in the same way as a single imitation in any other mimetic field, by having a single object: since the plot is an imitation of an action, the latter ought to be both unified and

> complete, and the component events ought to be so firmly compacted that if any one of them is shifted to another place or removed, the whole is loosened up and dislocated... ( **Poetics**:11: 32)

One can notice that this rule was not always applied by the tragic poets. At least in two examples the breaking of this rule is observed. In Aeschylus' **Eumenides** and in Euripides' **Alceste** , the action is dislocated violently in terms of space. In the first example Orestes goes to Argos, passes by Delphos and the second part of the play happens in Athens - a total rupture of the space unity in the longest trilogy left in the Greek collection. In the second play, Heracles ( the latin Hercules ) abandons the city of Alceste, and Feres, in the Tessalia, and leaves for Hades, where he does everything before finally accomplishing his objective ( he almost forgot what he was going to do there ), spending a long time in a plentiful banquet. In this second play one finds breaks in the unity of place and also in that of action too.

From the two examples cited above one can deduce that unity of action means the solution created by the poet that proposes a reasonable itinerary of events. It results, therefore, from the unification that the poetic construction operates to conjugate the historical unities with poetic unity.

When Aristotle defends the unification of plot, he is clearly defending that all plots have a temporal course. More specifically, Aristotle infers from the resemblance to the temporal sequencing of life that plots must have a beginning, middle and end. The critic Cynthia Freeland, in her article "**Plot Imitates Action**" ( in Rorty: 111-132), notices how schematic the relevant kind of imitation of life is. Aristotle says that plots are not to begin or end at just any point whatsoever. Freeland thinks that if plot should imitate life,

there would be a contradiction there, because a person's life does indeed "of necessity follow on something else" at the very least on birth. One may then ask the following questions as to when the stories of Oedipus and Agamemnon actually begin. If both Sophocles' and Aeschylus ' versions presuppose various background events (including the cursed family "guénos"), when do these stories really start? The poet, through the plot, selects other events as the middle and end of a story, thus artificially making clear the delineation of a moral schematic pattern of choice/ action / consequences.

Though there is some ambiguity in Aristotle's description of action in the **Poetics**, Freeland reminds us that what is crucial to keep in mind is the tension between constructed plot and depicted reality. Freeland says that the poet constructs plot by selecting an abstract pattern of words and speeches. The audience recognizes these speeches as depictions of actions, by decoding a highly complex symbol system involving elevated language, mime, character, narration and intertextuality with the previous literary tradition. She considers plot artificial, by selecting the apparently inocuous structuring of action by a beginning, middle and end the poet artificially isolates part of a depicted life, making the actions' pre - conditions and consequences more clearly visible than they are ever likely to be in real life. According to Freeland, the represented action is to be understood and evaluated by the audience as though it were real, revealing consequences that are those that occur in reality (Freeland in Rorty:116). In other words, one finds in Aristotle's **Poetics** ( through the definition that tragedy imitates an action ), Aristotle's defense of a moral application of art, perhaps in contradiction to Plato's view of art in the **Republic** (book X ) in which he says that art corrupts citizens.

In section 12 of the **Poetics**, Aristotle shows the difference between simple and

complex plots, and he favors the complex as the best type of plot. He explains the reason for his choice by saying that in order for a plot to be complex, two powerful elements of emotional interest should be included: *Peripety* and/or *Recognition*. A complex action is one in which the change is accompanied by reversal of the situation (Peripety) or by Recognition, or by both. These should arise from the internal structure of the plot, so that what follows should come "either by necessity or in accordance with probability; for there is a great difference in whether these events happen because of those or merely after them" (Poetics: 12:35). Aristotle defines what he means by *Peripety* and *Recognition.* He understands *Peripety* as being "a shift of what is being undertaken to the opposite in the way previously stated, and that in accordance with probability or necessity as we have just been saying"; and *Recognition* is , as the name indicates: "a shift from ignorance to awareness, pointing in the direction either of close blood ties or of hostility, of people who have previously been in a clearly marked state of happiness or unhappiness" (**Poetics,** 12: 35-36).

Aristotle considers the finest kind of recognition the one that happens together with Peripety as in Sophocles' **Oedipus Rex** ( this play is mentioned as an example of the important role of the words for the cathartic effects). In this play, Aristotle envisages examples of Peripety which combined with Recognition will excite *Pity* and *Fear* and these are the kinds of emotion that characterize the tragic acts of which tragedy is an imitation , "since, then, the construction of the finest tragedy should be not simple but complex and at the same time imitative of fearful and pitiable happenings. ( **Poetics**, 13: 37-38 ). The best plots are the ones that produce these effects. Pity" is directed towards the man who does not deserve his misfortune "and fear is" directed towards the one who

is like the rest of mankind - what is left is the man who falls between these two extremes and such a man is neither a paragon of virtue and justice nor undergoes the change to misfortune through any real badness or wickedness but because of some mistake" (**Poetics**, 13:38).

According to Aristotle, *Pity* and *Fear* should be aroused from the very structure of events. The plot should be so well structured , even without the benefit of any visual effect, that "the one who is hearing the events unroll, shudders with fear and feels pity at what happens" causing in the audience a *catharsis*, a release of suppressed feelings (**Poetics**, 14: 40).

Pity and fear will preferably proceed from the intimate connection of the facts and they can appear from the spectacle in which plot is responsible for producing these effects. The spectacle is considered an external aspect of art, it being a mistake to search through the monstruous as being a tragic element because the real pleasure of tragedy comes from Pity and Fear provoked by imitation of facts. The action must then be related to pity and fear and Aristotle stipulates that the action produce these effects.

Pity and fear as Aristotle presents them are intimately related to the structure of the plot, and to the action itself, though action in tragedy suggests a kind of ambiguity if one compares it to human life. Kosman in his article "**Acting: Drama as Mimesis of *Praxis***" (Kosman in Rorty: 51-72) says that this ambiguity is not lateral, between a series of coextensive and equally applicable descriptions, but categorical, between these two fundamentally different modes of capturing an individual action:

> On the one hand an action is the object of the intentional states of a

> deliberative and choosing agent; it is what we do in the sense that it is what we are about and what we take ourselves to be doing. On the other hand, however, an action is an act: it is what we do in the sense of what emerges as the result of our intentional activity. ( in Rorty: 65)

Kosman thinks that "what is revealed in tragedy is the ever- present possibility of a fracture between these two aspects of action. Tragic lives figure the chance of rift between actions understood as the expressions of the character and intentional choices of moral agents and actions as events in an objective world outside the control of such agents, actions with a life of their own which thus transcends the intentions and plans of their authors" ( in Rorty : 65 ). Kosman illustrates this with Aeschylus' **Oresteia**. Indeed in the first play of the trilogy, **Agamemnom**, there is a moral ambiguity in Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia. This fact can be the fulfilment of a duty, obedience to a divine order and yet at the same time a dreadful crime.

One may witness in the background of the **Poetics** Aristotle's interest in the question of moral action, as Kosman argues: "His attention here is on the ways in which our deliberations, choices and moral plans may ultimately prove feckless or offer us no *safe* choice, and of the *fear* and *pity* which are occasioned by the recognition of this fact" (Kosman, in Rorty: 65). These fears which are occasioned by this recognition are more general than our individual / real fears ( for example: the fear we have we might kill our fathers).

These fears reveal the terrifying frailty of virtue and the vulnerability of the happiness that we, correctly and for all the right reasons, aim at in the cultivation of such virtue. Behind these fears is thus the fact of human vulnerability, a fact that derives from the very structure and nature of human actions and the tenuous relation between virtue

and happiness which in turn results from that nature. According to Kosman:

> tragic poetry, precisely because it is mimetic, provides a context in which these fears may be experienced in ways detached from the painful and paralyzingly frightful modes of experience in our daily life ... these fears are associated with the darker and more pervasive recognition of human limitation that is central to tragedy... The fear and pity which tragedy occasions are wed precisely to the recognition that goodness of character and goodness of deliberation can lead, not simply to disatrous consequence, but to disastrous actions on the part of an agent . ( Kosman in Rorty: 66 )

Besides providing moral reflection, pity and fear and consequently catharsis, tragedy offers the audience a kind of pleasure.Through the empathy of the audience with the action performed on stage, pleasure is also felt. One may question if what Aristotle meant, precisely, by tragic catharsis has ever been entirely clear. Maybe Aristotle intended to justify tragedy in the light of Plato's attack that tragedy aroused passions that defied rational control. The **Poetics** is (according to Kosman ) indeed a "Defense of Poetry" and the catharsis would probably be the basis of the psychic purification that tagedy brings about. Presumably, the spectator, having spent his emotions in the course of the play, would leave the theater in the calm and rational state that befitted the citizen of a well-ordered republic.

Freeland thinks that "Aristotle's evaluations of plot construction are grounded in his view of tragedy's essential aim- to produce *catharsis*. The audience judges that the depicted events are ones that are pitiable and fearful, and accordingly, they actually feel pity and fear; and from these arises a catharsis. In such a case audience members take pleasure from their awareness that they are responding to a play, or a depiction, but the plot which facilitates catharsis works by receding into the background and letting the

events speak for themselves. The tragic emotions of pity and fear that are essential to catharsis fundamentally involve certain moral judgments. Pity in particular requires feeling / judging that a good person, someone like ourselves, suffers something undeserved." (Freeland in Rorty: 122 ). According to Freeland the notion of catharsis has proved notoriously evasive. She considers two broad lines of interpretation, the cognitivist and the emotional account. In both of these views, she wants to show that Aristotle's moral realism proves crucial to his aesthetic evaluations.

According to the cognitivist, "catharsis does involve feeling, but more importantly it requires making appropriate intellectual judgments about particular deliberative decisions represented in tragedy" ( Freeland in Rorty:122 ). The emotivist reason as opposed to the cognitivist point of view is that "the pleasure of catharsis is not in and of itself the pleasure of learning or thinking something, but rather of seeing and feeling something. Though audience members may exercise cognitive skills in viewing and reacting to a tragedy, this is not the real pleasure of tragedy" (Freeland, in Rorty: 124 ).

Pity and fear are aroused in order to effect a *catharsis*. The classical notion of catharsis combines several ideas: it is a medical term, referring to a therapeutic cleansing or purgation; it is a religious term, referring to a purification achieved by the formal and ritualized expression of powerful and often dangerous emotion; it may have cognitive connotations, referring to an intellectual resolution or clarification that involves directing emotions to their appropriate intentional objects. All three forms of catharsis are meant, at their best, to lead to the proper functioning of a well- balanced soul. The psychological catharsis of the audience takes place through, and because of the catharsis of the dramatic action. A plot that has been resolved is one whose unity is revealed: the various incidents

that compose it are recognized by the protagonist and by the audience to be strongly interconnected in a harmonic whole. [24]

Catharsis should not only be a relief from the "fears by revealing a deeper rationality and order of the world in which human agency operates, a perspective fromwhich that world may be absolved and its fundamental goodness reaffirmed."[25] According to what Kosman thinks:

> Tragedy reveals to us a critical fact (...) about human agency: the fact that happiness is subject to vicissitude in a manner that neither character nor virtue nor deliberation can ultimately guard against. Aristotle means neither to deny that fact nor to characterize tragic poetry as denying it. He rather thinks of tragedy as a human institution designed to help us accept it. We may think of such accptance as ultimately restorative of our trust in the world, but it is not founded for Aristotle on a palliation of the tragic truth about the efficacy of human agency in that world. Nor is it founded on a relief effected by simple emotional "purgation". This fact may reveal one final respect... in which attention to the mimetic nature of tragic action may allow a new appreciation of *catharsis* both as *lustrative* rather than merely *purgative* and as objective rather than simply a feature of audience response." There is perhaps an unnecessary controversy and "in particular the familiar opposition between lustrative and purgative interpretations may be unnecessary;to stress the lustrative sense of *catharsis* is not per se to deny its purgative sense, for lustration is a purging of the purified object from its impurities and pollutions.(Kosman in Rorty: 66- 67 )

Kosman says that one "may see the catharsis which takes place in the theater as kin to those rituals of purification which effect atonement for agents who have acquired an objective guilt through no fault of their own or as the result of actions whose moral ambiguity is incommensurable with their guilt. Such purification is sometimes mimetically

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[24] Gerald Else in Aristotle's **Poetics**

[25] Kosman quoting Lesky's **Greek Tragedy**: **Modern Essays in Criticism** . New York , ed.Segal in Rorty : 66

represented on stage – " in a kind of salvation by purification. But purification may also take place not in praxis, but in drama," not, that is to say, in action mimetically represented, but in the acting which mimetically represents that action. It is here that the double emphasis of Aristotle's theory is important; tragedy is the mimesis of *Praxis dronton*: action acted." One can imagine Oedipus Rex ( the king ) receiving in the mimetic action of drama, the forgiveness and cleansing of guilt denied him in the praxis of life, missing in his own (fictional ) real - life role of *Phármakon* ( Kosman:67 -68 ).

Continuing her explanation about what she understands by catharsis, Kosman says that such catharsis is achieved through the *apodeixis* [execution ] in action of the events in all their complexity , and the resultant excitement in the compassionate audience of the fear and pity which are the occasion both of Oedipus' staged purification and of the audience's sympathetic purification. Through the ritualized and formalized action of tragic poetry, we as audience are thus enabled to participate in the restorative capacities of human societies to forgive and thus to heal the guilty sufferers of tragic misaction. And in so far as we are able to identify with Oedipus, for example, and to do so by the very fear and pity we experience at the witnessing of his fate and which is the occasion of his theatrical purification, we are at the same time relieved of the more painful ( and potentially paralyzing) aspects of the general fear we feel at the possibility of that identification: we achieve, like Orestes, a salvation through purgatory, a "*sóteria dia tés katharseós*" (Kosman, in Rorty; 67-68 ).

In relation to catharsis one can not omit the fact that the catharsis of a certain play is always connected to the cessation of the panic brought about by the acting. Besides

that, catharsis frees the spectators from the terrors dramatized and what remains is the compensation that after all everything that has been "presented" is but only a dramatization, an artistic experiment, a fiction, "an imitation". The relief is linked to the awareness that the spectator has always had that the theater /drama is not anything more than a form of rationalizing "myth".

Within another perspective, catharsis also occurs through the conciliatory solution created by the poet.The fiction is not totally "perverse" - it accomplishes a program previously stipulated which culminates in the pacification of spectators, of actors and of the mythic heroes. This relaxing effect, however, is produced together with the proposition of solution for problems of great seriousness ( moral, political, religious, anthropological ) contained in the myths. In the same way, the cathartic effects are responsible for converging educative, and "politically correct" messages to the Athenian citizen who has learned through the theater how to live in the newly inaugurated democratic regime.

The critic Jonathan Lear in his article "Katharsis" ( in Rorty :315-340 ) questions Aristotle's meaning in claiming that tragedy produces a *catharsis*. He says that this question has dominated Western Philosophy and literary criticism since the Renaissance. And as Lear affirms:

> In the last hundred years it has been widely accepted that by *katharsis* Aristotle meant a purgation of the emotions. Now there is a sense in which the interpretation of catharsis as purgation is unexceptionable: having aroused the emotions of pity and fear, tragedy does leave us with a feeling of relief; and it is natural for humans to conceive of this emotional process in corporeal terms: as having gotten rid of or expelled the emotions. But at this level of generality, the interpretation is as unhelpful as

it is unexceptionable (Lear, in Rorty: 315).

Lear wishes to find out how Aristotle conceived the process of *katharsis* as it occurs in the performance of a tragedy:

> Even if we accept that Aristotle drew on the metaphor of purgation in naming this emotional process "katharsis", what we want to know is: did he really think that this process was an emotional purgation or did he merely use the metaphor to name a process that he understood in some different way? At the level of mere metaphor there seems little reason to choose between the medical metaphor of purgation and its traditional religious competitor, purification, not to mention more general meanings of "cleansing", "separation", etc .( Lear, in Rorty: 315)

Throughout the article Lear makes the distinction between the purgative and purifying aspects of catharsis and he mentions as the most sophisticated view of catharsis, (which has been powerfully argued for in recent years), the idea that catharsis provides an education of the emotions. "Virtue, for Aristotle, partially consists in having the right emotional response to any given set of circumstances: feeling pain at painful circumstances, pleasure at pleasurable ones, and not feeling too much or too little pain or pleasure, but the right amount" (Lear, in Rorty: 316).

Lear says that tragedy, as it is argued, provides us with the appropriate objects towards which to feel pity and fear, in response to events that are worthy of those emotions. "Since our emotions are being evoked in the proper circumstances, they are also being educated, refined or clarified. By being given repeated opportunities to feel pity and fear in the right sort of circumstances, we are less likely to experience such emotions inappropriately: namely, in response to circumstances, having the appropriate emotional responses to circumstances, tragedy can be considered part of an ethical education" (Lear

in Rorty: 318 ).

Richard Janko, in his article "From Catharsis to the Aristotelian Mean", goes further in relation to the educational role of tragedy through catharsis.( in Rorty: 341-358) He argues that Aristotle believed that catharsis can lead to virtue: "our response to the representation ( mimesis ) of human action can habituate us to approximate more closely to the mean in our ordinary emotional reactions." ( In Rorty:341 ) Janko also thinks that Aristostle's **Poetics** is a defense of Poetry against Plato's accusation of art in Republic X . It is through Aristotle's refutation of Plato's condemnation and banishment of art and the artist in the ideal polis, he says, that Aristotle defends the moral application of poetry, and this is done through the public experiencing of catharsis. Tragedy and its consequent effects (pity, fear and catharsis) are, according to Aristotle, a form of "paideia", that is, moral education. The key to this education lies in "mimesis". Aristotle, differently from Plato ( who thought the audience would confuse mimesis and reality, mistaking the extreme situations portrayed on the stage for everyday social norms to be followed in life), believed that people could distinguish representation from reality and Aristotle's spectators would, through the process of catharsis in "mimesis", come to acquire appropriate / moral emotional reactions.

In order to make an attempt at comparing these four critics: Freeland, Lear, Janko and Kosman, one may begin by saying that all of them have different interpretations of tragedy and of the word *katharsis*. This is due to the fact that all of the controversy about Aristotle's **Poetics** has roots in the Greek language itself. The four critics do diverge in their discussion of *katharsis* for example because of the several possible meanings of the word. *Pathos* is another word which seems to have at least two meanings: suffering and a

terrible act. Also the aims of music are translated differently by Lear and Janko. Lear talks about "intellectual enjoyment" whereas Janko mentions "educative entertainment".

Catharsis in Aristotle is essentially a detachment or release of the spectator from feelings of attraction or repulsion toward the character, especially the *hero* ( tragic character) to whom Aristotle dedicates section 15 of his **Poetics**. But in order to understand Aristotle's notions of tragic characters, one has to know what the hero means in the context of tragedy and myth.

The question of the hero is found in myth, in history, in literature, in anthropology, in psychology and even in cartoon stories nowadays. The starting point for understanding the concept of the hero lies in the heroic times, when the heroes were "born" and when no one thought about them, when literature and history were the same and when myth was always confused with reality and vice versa. Later one can see that the hero is separated from his origin, entering into history in order to be initiated into literature.

In the book "**O que é o herói**", Martin Cezar Feijó[26] makes a retrospective of the hero since the birth of civilization until the present time. He says that the birth of the hero came with myth . Myth would be a consolation against history and the hero a consolation against human weakness. The notion of the hero came with the third cycle of the Greek mythology, the semigods' cycle ( or the heroic cycle). These semigods were children of gods with mortals and were outstanding in their heroic feats. Therefore Greek mythology may be summarized in the life of gods and heroes. The gods had human

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[26] Translations from Martin Feijó's **O que é Herói,** São Paulo, Editora Brasiliense, 1984

characteristics(like vices and virtues) and the heroes had divine characteristics with special powers even though they were mortal.

Feijó reminds the readers that there are many studies about myth and he selects a few to be examined. An anthropological study has been made by the American scholar Paul Rodin – "**O Ciclo Heróico dos Winnebagos**"(about a Navajo Tribe) - who discovered that the myth of the hero is similar among different kinds of peoples in different epochs, in customs and in language. One should have in mind that the notion of hero as understood according to the mythic tradition does not have the same treatment of the hero understood as a discourse category. One can also think of two of Joseph Campbell 's works, **The Hero with a Thousand Faces** and **Transformations of Myth through Time**, in which he says that there are more similarities than differences between the myths of all times. Campbell is in favor of the unification of the mythologies and religions of mankind because in spite of some minor differences about myths and religions "truth is only one", but "the wiser people talk about it in many names"[27]

It seems that the creation and the survival of symbols is a work of the unconscious which is present in the cultural life of a certain community. Both Feijó and Campbell, among others, believe that all myths, from the ancient Greek to the present time (especially in "primitive societies" still existent nowadays: Indians, African tribes, etc,), appear in different versions from their original ones, but they are similar to one another.

But why so much similarity?, Feijó would then ask. One attempted answer would be that this similarity is not outside man, but inside his mind – "in the winding road

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[27] Campbell mentions the Vedas'philosophy in the Preface to **The Hero with a Thousand Faces** : 12

of the human mind"( Feijó:20).

The starting point for the study of the human mind is Sigmund Freud who initiated the psychological study on the question of myths. But Jung went further with the question of myths in human psychology, especially in his discussion of the question of the hero. In Freud the great discovery lies in his "interpretation of dreams" in which dreams would manifest the repression of our unconscious . In Jung what is important is the relation of dreams to the symbols of our culture. Therefore, myths are inside us and they appear in the form of dreams and symbols. Freud used to call these manifestations "archaic symbols". Jung called them "Archetypes" or "Primordial images" (Jung: O **homem e seus Símbolos)**.

In the Freudian theory the unconscious produces "plots" in which the "I" (ego) can only be seen as transformed. This process of amplification undertaken by the unconscious makes the "ego" feel "all powerful" visualizing itself in the dreams as a hero.The dream would then be an acting out (a dramatization) of the unconscious where heroes and powerful forces would interact due to a state of absolute freedom and to the primitive force that reins over the unconscious. In Jung the dreams are the privileged channels through which the archetypes of the individual and collective unconscious meet in movement.

Jung 's explanation is that the archetype is a tendency of the instinct, not of reason, manifested through the senses and not through knowledge. That is, we do not have control over it ( the myth ) because it is a part of ourselves unknown to us, the unconscious. It is manifested in phantasy, being revealed through symbolic images. These

symbols tend to become collective: the "collective unconscious". Every community eventually has the same belief and the symbols begin to leave the psychological individual domain and to take on a form that tends to be accepted "collectively", by all members of a certain society.

In relation to the hero myth, Jung says that the universal myth of the hero always refers to a man or to a man-god who is almighty and powerful to the point of defeating evil, embodied in the form of dragons, serpents, monsters, daemons and so on and that always releases his people from destruction and from death. The narration of ceremonies and of sacred texts and the cult of the hero figure - ( which includes dances, music, hymns, prayers and sacrifices) catch up the audience in an emotional atmosphere, exalting the individual to the point of his identification with the hero.

The initiation "rite" of myths and heroes in our culture occurs by the transference of emotions through literature. It is in the literary creation ( fruit of imagination and knowledge) that one can find the struggle of the hero to reach his maturity, and our own initiation is the discovery of our own identity.

This struggle is the trajectory of the hero because at the moment in which the hero abandons the myth, two alternatives appear: separation ( escape) or initiation (acceptance of the challenge ). The literary hero accepts the challenge.

The tragic hero was born with the Greek theater and was created from the acting rite. There were two main Greek religious manifestations in the ancient Greek age: the cult to the god of wine, Dionysus, and the one to the goddess of fertility, Ceres. In the ritual in honor of the god Dionysus, individual men and women would drink until reaching the state of ecstasy, when they were transformed into "Satyrs" ( half man, half goat ) and

one of them would "receive" Dionysus for the offerings and for the beginning of the orgy.

This feast was called "The Ode ( Chant ) of the Goat" ( Tragedy ).* The cult to the goddess of agriculture and of fertility was simpler: it was a kind of procession in which the participants sang the "happy Chant" ( the meaning of Comedy in Greek).

The theater was born when these festivities were no longer spontaneous and began to be dramatized to a passive public that was involved with the scene in another way: through the emotional involvement that the Greeks called "catharsis" ( already studied above ). The theater was born when the liturgical form of the myths was gradually replaced by an aesthetic formula that prevailed and was appreciated according to the taste of the epoch. This phenomenon was an irruption of a new "modus faciendi", that recreated the liturgic-religious ritualization of the sacred plots. From the end of the VI century. B.C. on, the sacred plots were secularized and started to be treated as thematic sources for the new artistic genre ( literary and architectonic ) of the theater ( Frye: 194).

Authors began writing plays for these dramatizations after Aeschylus gave unity to the speech of the god-hero, Prometheus. From this point on the theater began to have autonomy from the religious rite, and the hero of the theater started to abandon the sphere of the sacred (myth) in order to reach the sphere of the human.

Thus the theater becomes autonomous when the dramatic hero abandons the sphere of the canonic myth in order to reach the sphere of the ficctionalized poetic myth subject to the requirements of the tragedians and to their artistic intentions. The emotional involvement of the public ocurred no longer through religiosity but through the subtleties

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* This was already explained in the section on the origin of tragedy in the beginning of this work.

and artificialities of the aesthethic mimesis, i.e. the aesthetic effects prevailed over the religious ones. Before the V century B.C. , myth was always related to the sacred and later on, became linked to the theatrical staging ( aesthetic, dramatic and tragic staging ). This fact was due to the artistic / mimetic operation that produced the public identification with the hero's destiny ( Feijó : 12-26)

The most extraordinary case in the myth of the human being is the one of Oedipus. Sophocles' **Oedipus Rex** is based on two basic moments: the mythic and the tragic one. The mythic aspect is that Oedipus was destined to kill his father and to marry his own mother. In myth, destiny is indifferent to the human will. In **Oedipus**, destiny prevails above everything. Oedipus in Sophocles'version was transformed from a myth into a especially tragic hero - a poetic artifact.

Sophocles, in his play **Oedipus Rex**, transformed the oral myth into tragedy, showing that Oedipus' main tragedy lies mainly in his discovery (recognition) of his own identity. What has been mysterious and magic in the mythic vision is transformed into a deeply human experience in the theatrical version of Oedipus' tragedy.

We can envisage the two moments: in ( sacred) myth, destiny, from which no man escapes, prevails; in tragedy what is important is the struggle of the hero with his destiny. The tragic hero is defeated when facing the force of destiny. This struggle humanizes him.

The tragic hero does not conform himself to his destiny. That is his essence. Different from the epic hero, he is closer to the modern hero of poetry and romance. With the "birth of literature" there has been a transformation in the hero's destiny. In mythology, the hero is divine. In epic poetry, he is a unity of feeling and action. In history, he is

treated as being apart from the historical reality. In literature, the destiny of the hero is his initiation: the discovery of himself. The hero continues to visit all kinds of "hells", but principally he "strolls" over his own soul. He also tries to grasp history but is always surpassed by it. His discovery, though tragic or violent, is always a step toward diminishing his own limitations ( our own limitations). The history of literature is the history of the passage from the divine hero to the human hero, and this is done through the development of *the character.*

Aristotle dedicates section fifteen ( 15) of the **Poetics** to the study of the tragic characters. He says that there are four things to be aimed at when one is defining the characters. The first requirement is that they should be good. The characters should reveal through their speech and action moral quality and good choices (**Poetics** 15: 43-44) Aristotle continues to affirm that good character exists in each category of persons, for example "a woman can be good, or a slave, although one of these classes is inferior and the other, as a class, worthless". The second requirement is that they be appropriate; for it is possible for a character to be brave, but that would be inappropriate for a woman. The third requirement is their likeness to human nature in general for this is different from making the character good and appropriate according to the criteria previously mentioned. And the fourth requirement is consistency, "for even if the person being imitated is inconsistent, and that kind of character has been taken as the theme, he should be inconsistent in a consistent fashion"( **Poetics**, 15 : 43).

Aristotle says:

> In character portrayal also, as in plot construction, one should always strive for either the necessary or the probable, so that it is either necessary

> or probable for that kind of person to do or say that kind of thing, just as it is for one event to follow the other. It is evident, then, that the dénouements of plots also should come out of the character itself, and not from the *machine*[28]. Rather the machine should be used for things that lie outside the drama proper, either previous events that a human being cannot know, or subsequent events which require advance prophecy and exposition; for we grant the gods the ability to foresee everything. But let there be no illogicality in the web of events, or if there is, let it be outside the play.(**Poetics** , 15: 44)

Aristotle concludes his section on tragic characters by saying that "since tragedy is an imitation of persons who are better than average, one should imitate the good portrait/ painters, for in fact, while rendering likeness of their sitters by reproducing their individual appearance, they also make them better- looking; so the poet, in imitating men who are irascible or easygoing or have other traits of that kind, should make them, while still plausibly drawn, morally good." ( Poetics 15 : 44)

The philosopher Hegel, when dealing with the theory of the tragic in the work **Philosophy of Fine Art**[29], has as his major preoccupation the action of the characters, the element which, according to him, constitutes the cause for all the suffering and unhappiness that may arise and which characterizes a play as genuine tragedy. [30] This action, which he calls tragic, depends fundamentally on the tragic characters and its

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[28] The "machine"was of course simply a hand- operated crane which would hoist a god , or occasionally another key person, onto the roof of the stage building for a more -than-mortal appearance.The use of a deus ex- machina to unravel a tangled plot was particularly characteristic of Euripides. Medea plays a variation on the role at the end of her tragedy. (Endnote number 109 in Aristotle's **Poetics**:99)

[29] One can also find Hegel's idea about tragedy in his work :**Teoria da Tragédia** (Frederich Schiller. S.Paulo , E.P.U.,1992).

[30] These ideas of Hegel's theory of the tragic are based on the article " Classical vs.Modern Tragedy: A discussion of Sophocles ' **Antigone** and Shakespeare ' s **Macbeth** based on Hegel's **Philosophy of Fine Art** " (Eduardo Coutinho. **Anais do XXII SENAPULLI**,UFRJ: 1990 :256-268)

content "is supplied by the world of those forces which carry in themselves their own justification, and are realized substantively in the volitional activity of mankind"[31] .

Hegel thinks that the characters have important roles in the tragic plays especially by what he calls the second mode of representation "individual pathos" ( the first mode of representation is "the simple consciousness" which is represented by the collective chorus). This "individual pathos" is represented by the character of the tragic hero and the conflict it provokes . The individual subject of this pathos is not a common character in the modern use of the term , neither is he a mere abstraction . He is a special being in the sense that he possesses such an intensification of the various aspects of life that he commitshimself entirely to his duty, the fulfillment of which becomes his only objective in life. Pathos then constitutes the character himself, who acts therefore in accordance with what he is, and this is, for Hegel, what constitutes the greatness of the tragic hero.

Aristotle sees tragedy in terms of wrong doing, an error in judgement: "... what is left is the man who falls between these extremes. Such is a man who is neither a paragon of virtue and justice nor undergoes the change to misfortune through any real badness or wickedness but because of some mistake" (**Poetics**, 13: 38). The characters are considered tragic in a tragedy especially because of the tragic flaw they carry in their personalities. This tragic flaw is a "mistake", an error which makes the tragic characters guilty, and which lies upon the violation of the world's order. The tragic flaw which the character carries is called "*hamartia*" which is essential to the hero. It is not necessarily a

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[31] All references to Hegel's **Philosophy of Fine Art** come from Paolucci , Henry and Anne, eds **Hegel on Tragedy**. The source will be cited as H.

moral defect but rather a matter of being in a certain place which exposes the hero to a tragic action.

Some critics have attempted to understand and to analyze what Aristotle really meant by the term "Hamartía". A. O. Rorty in her article "The Psychology of Aristotelian Tragedy" (Rorty: 1-22) tries to relate *hamartía* to virtue. She asks how virtue can be subject to hamartia and how it can involve wayward misunderstanding. She wonders whether Aristotle believes a person to be at least in part responsible for his/her character, and as such, how the protagonist 's suffering may be undeserved.

Rorty thinks that if there is an adequate answer to these questions, it lies in Aristotle's understanding of hamartia , but she admits that the current translations of the term do not help us. "Flaw" misleadingly suggests that hamartia is built into the protagonist's character. Rorty argues that if the protagonist's erring waywardness were part of his character, he would not be an exemplary figure, his suffering would not be undeserved, and we would not pity him. If, on the other hand, his hamartia were involuntary, purely extraneous- like an accidental illness- we would not, seeing his character in action, fear for him. In neither case would the drama be well structered or unified; in neither case could we learn anything from tragedy; nor would it please us. She says:

> Yet translating hamartia as "error" or "mistake" misleadingly fails to capture the disppositional character of the protagonist's hamartia; and in emphasizing its purely intellectual aspect, those notions also fail to capture the way that the protagonist's hamartia affects his *thymós* [value/worth ]and *pathê* [suffering] as well as his thoughts. Though a protagonist's hamartia might sometimes just involve his making a factual error, it is the sort of error that a person of his character would be typically prone to make. In

> combination with his character, it misleads his action. (For instance, a character given to grand postures might systematically mistake the size and importance of his family estate, and so characteristicaly but voluntarilly treat his neighbors with untoward arrogance).Character virtues and their susceptibilities are simultaneously cognitive and conative: they affect a person's passions and desires, as well as his perceptions and inferences. (Rorty:10)

In the best tragedies, according to Rorty, "the reversals of fortune [ Peripety ] that the protagonists suffer come from something central in them, not from any particular thing that they did, but from a waywardness that could not, even with more foresight or energy, have been prevented. The *hamartiai* that bring misfortune are contingent byproducts of admirable character traits, traits that are the natural basis of the virtues and that normally promote thriving." ( Rorty :10 )

Rorty thinks that *Harmatia* can be compared to a kind of cancer. It is as if there is a "contingent growths that arise from the very activities that promote healthy physical development. Noble intentions can, often by the logic and development of their own momentum, lead to actions whose full trajectory reverses their origins. Such reversals are especially likely to occur in the interaction among several characters, each acting from the arc of their own intentions" ( Rorty:11)

Tragedy reveals that there is, as it were, a canker in the very heart of action. All action is made by intelligence, to be certain but by an intelligence directed to a relatively limited end. The gap of opacity, and with it the possibility of ignorance and deflection, always remains between even the best general purposes and the particular actions that realize and complete them. Though it falls within the domain of the voluntary, the tragic hero's *hamartia* is an accident of his excellence: his aims make him susceptible to a kind of

defiance that arises from his character. Although the occasions that develop the consequences of the agent's *hamartia* are incidental, they are the kinds of things which might well happen. Once they have occurred, the dramatic action that brings about the reversal of the protagonist's fortune has- in the best of tragedies - an awful and irreversible inevitability. The focused clarity, the guarantee, the vitality and energy of exemplary, excellent action- its very godlikeness- are hidden by the misdirections that threaten their goodness. Concentration shades what is at the periphery of attention; courage sets natural caution aside; great heartedness carries the possibility of conceit; a person of distinction, with an unusual extent of action, can readily lose his sense of proper proportion, forget his finitude. Everything that is best in the protagonists makes them exposed to their reversals: like all living creatures, they naturally struggle to realize what is best in them; and it is precisely this that, as their actions evolve, obliterates them.

The cancer that is at the heart of the tragic protagonist's *hamartia* often implies his not knowing who he is, his ignorance of his real identity [ as in Oedipus ]. As Rorty says: "To know who one is is to know how to act ; it involves understanding of one's obligations and what is important in one's interactions. The kind of ignorance that literally involves not knowing one's family is particularly dangerous because it affects all of a person's sacred, political and ethical conduct. But a protagonist can be superficially, verbally aware of who he is, and yet fail to carry that knowledge through to his conduct, acting as if he were ignorant of what he claims to know (in Rorty : 11 ). As an example Rorty refers to Phaedra in Euripides ' **Hippolytus**. " Phaedra's passion for Hippolytus expresses a dramatic hamartia: her desire leads her to forget the fact that she is the wife of Theseus and stepmother to Hippolytus. In a queen, such a *hamartia* puts the whole

kingdom in danger." There are other examples in the same family of the Labdacids, Antigone who ignores the designs of Aphrodite and Etiocles that disdains the possibility that his brother might be imprisoned in the last door of Thebes.

Rorty finishes the section on *hamartia* by saying that there are no merely intellectual errors in the dramatic world ( which is composed entirely of serious actions that affect the tenor of life). "When a drama is composed entirely of serious actions, even factual errors are weighty: a person who is ignorant of his lineage is likely to act improperly." As an example, Rorty mentions Oedipus' ignorance of his own identity, his lineage and of the vulnerability of human life. Oedipus' ignorance was not merely an intellectual error, but a waywardness that pervarded his actions, so too his acknowledgement of his waywardness is not merely a cognitive recognition. "It consists in his living out his life, a blind man wandering, "a horror, a pollution to be avoided" (Rorty: 11-12 ).

Vernant in his article "Myth and Tragedy" ( in Rorty:33-50 ), affirms that :

> Tragic man is constituted within the space encompassed by this pair, *ethos* [character] and *daimon* [religious power]. If one of the two is eliminated, he vanishes... Just as the tragic character comes into being within the space between dáimon and éthos, so tragic culpability is positioned in between on the one hand the ancient religious concepts of crime-defilement, *hamartia*, sickness of the mind, the delirium sent by the gods that necessarily engenders crime, and on the other the new concept in which the guilty one, *hamartón* and, above all, *adikón* (unfair / unjust ), is defined as one who, under no compulsion, has deliberately chosen to commit a crime.( Vernant in Rorty :38 )

For instance, in Aeschylus' **Agamemnon** , Agamemnon is both the victim of an ancestral curse - the family "*guénos*" - as he pays for the crimes that he has not committed,

and a criminal himself as he has sacrificed his own daughter Iphigenia, and he expiates the crimes for which he is responsible:

> In its attempts at distinguishing the different categories of crime that fall within the competence of different courts... the law- even if still in a clumsy and hesitant manner - lays emphasis on the ideas of intention and responsibility. It raises the problem of the agent's different degrees of commitment in his actions. At the same time, within the city framework where all the citizens, following public discussions of a secular nature, themselves direct the affairs of the State, man himself is beginning to experiment as an agent who is more or less autonomous in relation to the religious forces that govern the universe, more or less master of his own actions ..., more or less in control of his political and personal destiny. (Vernant in Rorty :38 )

Another critic included in Rorty's anthology who treats the meaning of *Hamartia* is Nancy Sherman in her article "Hamartia and Virtue" ( in Rorty: 177-196). She says that when one thinks about Aristotle's **Poetics** in relation to tragedy one can become uneasy upon realizing that like the tragic protagonist, we too can unwittingly cause our own undoing through our own agency we can bring about our downfall. We are not in full control of our happiness- a familiar theme in Aristotle's theory of human action. As Sherman puts it:

> Living well is always subject to contingency and the unexpected. As such, happiness is a matter of both virtuous agency and luck. Our capacity for virtuous agency is itself in no small part a matter of luck. But what engages us most as tragic spectators is not simply luck. It is not what befalls the protagonist, either in terms of the hand dealt or the crossroads faced. Rather, it is how the tragic figure contributes to her own misfortune. Even where the action is performed under duress as the result of an external conflict, agency ( or causal responsibility) is still implicated. It is agency, or better, failed agency, that draws us in. The point is that individuals make mistakes ( *hamartiai*), largely unavoidable, that bring incurable suffering to themselves and those they love. Tragedy works

through the agent's own hands. It is a mimetic representation not merely of suffering, but of action . (Sherman in Rorty: 177-178 )

Sherman also says that:

> In thinking about *hamartia*, one contrast Aristotle has in mind is reasonably straightforward: the tragic hero is not simply the victim of arbitrary fate or irrational accident. An individual man may suffer harm because a tile falls on his head..., or an abnormal gust of wind carries his arrow off course mortally wounding his lover... These are cases of misfortune or bad luck. In some cases they are unlucky coincidences. But they are not the stuff of tragedy. For the *arkê* ( origin) of the cause of those ill effects is outside the agent. One is a victim, not an agent. Tragedy, in contrast, is about human action, its circunstances and errors. (Sherman:178)

It is true, Sherman affirms, that "accidents are often like mistaken choices. In both cases one may end up missing the target. Indeed, in Greek, the word *hamartia* is rooted in the notion of missing the mark ( *hamartanein*), and covers a broad spectrum that includes accident and mistake, as well as wrongdoing, error or sin. And Aristotle himself uses this full range of meaning. Moreover, certain accidents work through an agent's hands more than through others... very often the agent himself sets the chain of events in motion. But still the overall aspect is a happenstance: an agent happens to be doing something at an unpropitious moment"(178).

Tragic *hamartia*, in contrast, focuses on agency. Sherman continues to argue that the protagonist is not simply a victim of nature's whims or flawed mechanics. Rather what matters is that the agent chooses, yet chooses in a way that leads to calamity. The choice goes wrong because of ignorance or misjudgement that are *in principle* more within

human control than sudden bursts of wind. This need not imply culpability[32] ; to be the cause of harm, either through an act or omission, may be neither sufficient nor necessary for a moral accident to happen. Still it does point to a class of obstacles that are internal to the conditions of human agency. In the Aristotelian model, conviction and will together inform choice. More or less innocent defects in either can precipitate disastrous decisions ... [and in every case] the agent is causally responsible for the disaster that results. The calamity is made intelligible ( rationalized) by some aspect of the agent's own choice. Furthermore, the choice has something to do with a condition of character or agency- ignorance, interest, past judgments, passion and so on.[33]

In investigating the connection between ignorance, choice and character, Sherman fears she may be reviving the Renaissance and later, Victorian orthodox view of *hamartia* as a tragic flaw ( this concept was interpreted in the Renaissance as a characterological defect or moral "flaw", and this idea did much to develop the subsequent concept of drama as an interplay of action and character ). "On this view, the tragic hero comes to ruin through a "great wrongdoing or sin ...". In short, tragedy comes to embrace the spirit of retribution : having sinned, the protagonist is punished for his errant ways. From the perspective of the spectator, potential feelings of indignation at the sight of wrongdoing and hubris are quieted upon witnessing the punitive effects of self-wrought ruin." (Sherman in Rorty: 179 )

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[32] I disagree with Sherman's opinion about the hero's lack of culpability , as everything in tragedy is based on culpability . Greek theater is a space where practically all the actions of the legendary heroes'characters are judged . The Greek tragedy is especially about the character's *hamartia* and *fate* .

[33] Sherman in Rorty: 178 - 179

Sherman continues her interpretation of the term "hamartia" by saying that "the alternative notion of *hamartia* as a "mistake of fact" is not a perfect fit either. "Hamartia is inserted in the very essence of tragedy . "Truly fine characters", says Sherman," may not become morally wretched... as the result of suffering or even the most horrible disasters; they bear their misfortune nobly. But still their happiness is vulnerable. In a comparable way, tragedy reveals the dependence of happiness upon successful action. Goodness is not sufficient for happiness" ( Sherman in Rorty : 180 ).

Sherman views tragic error as "an illustration of the fragility of the good life." Aristotle assumes that virtuous individuals have neither divine exemption from contingency nor a stoic attitude toward suffering and disturbance. But ..., tragic errors, unlike other impediments that frustrate well - intentioned plans, are impediments of which the agent is the cause. It is in this area of mitigated responsibility that the **Poetics** can contribute to the general discussion of moral luck ," ( Sherman in Rorty: 180 -81 ), for the peculiar task of tragedy is to show that these external facts are not external, that they are implicated in our agency.

Sherman says that "despite a long tradition of lively interest within the secondary literature on the notion of hamartia, the term itself receives surprisingly little treatment in the **Poetics**. It is introduced rather inconspicuously in chapter 13 within a discussion of the sort of reversals ( *peripeteiai*) that best arouse pity and fear." (Sherman in Rorty: 181 )

Sherman thinks that "what is striking is that Aristotle offers no technical definition of the term. In stark contrast to the renderings of reversal and recognition in the chapters before, *hamartia* is slipped in without technical coinage." ( Sherman in Rorty: 181 ) I disagree with Sherman's comment as one can observe that Aristotle does not omit

a definition of the term *hamartia*. The term in the **Poetics** is as imprecise as the term *mimesis* and all the other terms contained in it. This imprecision is due to the fact that Aristotle's **Poetics** is above all a fragmentary manual, a course "syllabus" that Aristotle certainly used in his classes. It is not a finished work, but on the contrary a collection of notes, a plan of course that guided him during his oral explanations. Sherman herself can see that "the idea is clear enough that *hamartia* will serve as the causal link that moves the protagonist from ignorance to recognition , and from fortune to ruin. It is the mechanism that initiates the movements of reversal and recognition... Hamartia triggers the reversal which exposes the severity and calamity of the error... The tragic choice precipitates an epistemic change and change of fortune." ( Sherman in Rorty: 181-82 )

Sherman observes that Aristotle hardly mentions openly the term *hamartia* and adds that:

> The nature of the *hamartia* that leads to disaster is left open, and indeed, indefinite. The cause of the fall is *some* error ... that at very least, is not rooted in malice. But there are foolishnsses that fall short of evil or wrongdoing, self- deceptions that distort, good principles which must, on occasion, yield to others. The sort of errors that can bring an agent down are indefinite and numerous; there are many ways to err, but only one way to get it right. Granted, considerations of pity and fear already restrict *who* can make the error, but not what sort of error they can make. ( Sherman in Rorty: 183 -84 )

Hamartia appears in the hero especially because he can not escape his *fate* or *Moira*. This term is man's blind destiny or lot, to which he can not escape. Moira is present in Greek Mythology and it first appears in Greek literature in the Homeric epics to denote a man's individual lot or destiny ( Moira ). Homer's Moira is the personification of Fate directing the consequences of man's actions at the behest of gods. In classical mythology, the *Fates* or Moiras were a Trio of "goddesses" who were believed to

determine at a man's birth the span or limit of his life. Hesiod was the first Greek to give the fates names, lineage and a particular function. At one time he makes them the unnamed daughters of Night and the sisters of Death; at another the daughters of Zeus and Justice. In Hesiod's Mythology he develops the personification of several fates, identifying the Moiras as three daughters of Zeus and Themis: Clotho, the spinner, Lachesis, the disposer/assigner of lots; and Atropos, the inevitable ( the unbending one). The first spins the thread of life, the second assigns to man his fate, and the third severs the thread (**Encyclopedia Americana** vols 11:46 and 19:54).

Jean Pierre Vernant in his article "Myth and Tragedy" ( in Rorty : 33-50) says that the tragic action has a polarity: "to act and not to act and tempt *fate*" ( Vernant in Rorty:33 ). Vernant thinks that:

> In the tragic writers, human action is not, of itself, strong enough to do without the power of the gods, not autonomous enough to be fully conceived without them. Without their presence and their support, it is nothing - either abortive or producing results quite other than those initially envisaged. So it is a kind of wager - on the future, on fate and on oneself, ultimately a wager on the gods for whose support one hopes. In this game, where he is not in control , man always risks being trapped by his own decisions. The gods are incomprehensible to him. When, as a precaution before taking action, he consults them and they deign to answer, their reply is as equivocal and ambiguous as the situation on which he asked for their advice. In contrast, tragedy creates a distance between the characters that it depicts upon the stage and the public who are its spectators. ( Vernant in Rorty: 33-34 )

According to Vernant, the tragic heroes belong to a different age from the 5th century Athens, and it is only by transporting them to a far - distant past, a legendary, other time outside the present, that the democratic polis can integrate into its own culture

the dramas that "destroyed" those royal houses and the misfortunes and ancestral curses that plagued them. The effect of the theatrical presentation, the costumes..., the masks and, in sum, their larger - than life characters was to transfer these figures to the level of the legendary heroes to whom cults were dedicated in the city. Yet, at the same time, by reason of the familiar, almost ordinary way they spoke and the discussions they entered into with the chorus and with each other, they were brought closer to the common man and were made, as it were, the contemporaries of the citizens of Athens who crowded the stepped banks of the theater. Vernant continues: "Because of this constant tension and opposition between the mythical past and the present of the polis that operates within each drama and each protagonist, the hero ceases to be regarded, as he was in Pindar, as a model and becomes instead an object of debate. He is brought before the public as a subject at issue. Through the debate that the drama sets up, it is the very status of man that becomes the problem. The enigma of the human condition is brought into question, not that the inquiry pursued by tragedy, ever started anew and never completed, can find any resolution or definite answer" (Vernant in Rorty: 34 ).

Still according to Vernant the real realm of tragedy lies in that limiting zone where human actions are connected together with the divine powers, where, unknown to the agent, they derive their true meaning by becoming an integral part of an order that is beyond man and that deludes him. Vernant says,

> Human nature... is defined in absolute contrast to religious power... The two are radically heterogeneous orders of reality. In tragedy they appear rather as two opposed but complementary aspects, the two poles of a single ambiguous reality. Thus all tragedy must necessarily be played out on two levels. (Vernant in Rorty :39).

Vernant exemplifies his assertion with Aeschylus' trilogy **Oresteia**, especially the first play, Agamemnon, with the famous carpet scene, where "the sovereign's fatal decision no doubt depends partly upon his wretched human vanity and also perhaps upon the guilty conscience of a husband who is the more ready to accede to the requests of his wife, given the fact that he is returning home to her with Cassandra as his concubine. But that is not the essential point. The strictly tragic effect comes from the intimate relation yet at the same time extraordinary distance between the banal action of stepping on a purple carpet with the all too human motivations this involves, and the religious forces that this action inexorably sets in motion."

In the play **Agamemnon**, the main character ( Agamemnon)'s destiny is set at the moment he sets foot on the carpet, it is at this exact moment that the drama reaches its consummation. As Vernan puts it:

> And even if the play is not quite over, it can introduce nothing that is not already accomplished, once and for all. The past, the present, and the future have fused together with a single meaning that is revealed and encapsulated in the symbolism of this action of impious hubris... At this culminatory point of the tragedy, where all the threads are tied together, the time of the gods invades the stage and becomes manifest within the time of men ( Vernant in Rorty: 39).

Tragedy determines a correlative union between religious and political thought. It leads one to reflection on the *polis* and on democracy and its institutions through the detachment caused by the the myth. There is always the question of an exaggerated power (that has in tyranny its most crucial model ) providing themes to tragedy.

Vernant 's views on tragedy and on Aristotle's **Poetics** are so numerous that they

demand a complete investigation. According to him, "Greek tragedy is strongly marked by a number of characteristics: tension between myth and the forms of thought peculiar to the city, conflict within man, within the domain of values, the world of the gods, and the ambiguous and equivocal character of language" ( Vernant 's **Myth and Tragedy** in Rorty: 33 ).

But Vernant thinks that the central feature that defines tragedy, is that:

> the drama brought to the stage unfolds both at the level of everyday existence, in a human, opaque time made up of successive and limited present moments, and also beyond this earthly life, in a divine, omnipresent time that at every instant encompasses the totality of events, sometimes to conceal them and sometimes to make them plain, but always so that nothing escapes it or is lost in oblivion. Through this constant union and configuration between the time of men and the time of the gods, throughout the drama, the play startingly reveals that the divine intervenes even in the course of human actions. (Vernant, in Rorty :33 )

When Vernant mentions Aristotle, he says that the Greek philosopher views tragedy as :

> the imitation of an action ( *mimesis praxeos )*. It presents characters engaged in action , *prattontes* . And the word "drama" comes from the Doric *dráo* that corresponds to the Attic *prattein*, to act. In effect, in contrast to epic and lyric, where the category of action is not represented since man is never envisaged as an agent, tragedy presents individuals engaged in action. It places them at the crossroads of a choice in which they are totally committed; it shows them on the threshold of a decision, asking themselves what is the best course to take. ( Vernant 's **Myth and Tragedy** in Rorty: 30)

Vernant considers tragedy not only an art form but also a social institution that the city, by establishing competition in tragedies, constitutes alongside its political and legal institutions. As he says:

> The city founded under the authority of the *eponymous archon* [a kind of minister of the spectacle], in the same urban space and in accordance with the same institutional norms as the popular assemblies or courts, a spectacle open to all the citizens, directed , acted and judged by the qualified representatives of the various tribes [ only men, not women ] . In this way it turned itself into a theater. Its subject, in a sense, was itself and it acted itself out before its public. But although tragedy, more than any other genre of literature, thus appears rooted in social reality, that does not mean that it is a reflection of it. It does not reflect that reality but calls it into question. By depicting it rent and divided against itself, it turns it into a problem. The drama brings to the stage an ancient heroic legend. For the city this legendary world constitutes the past - a past sufficiently distant for the contrasts, between the mythical traditions that it embodies and the new forms of legal and political thought, to be clearly visible; yet a past still close enough for the clash of values still to be a painful one and for this clash still to be currently taking place . (Vernant in Rorty: 36-7 )

Still according to Vernant, "tragedy is born when myth starts to be considered from the point of view of a citizen. But it is not only the world of myth that loses its consistency and dissolves in this focus. By the same token the world of the city is called into question and its fundamental values are challenged in the ensuing debate. When exalting the civic ideal and affirming its victory over all forces from the past, even Aeschylus, the most optimistic of the tragic writers, seems not to be making a positive declaration with tranquil conviction but rather to be expressing a hope, making an appeal that remains full of anxiety even amid the joy of the final apotheosis ."(Vernant in Rorty:37)

In a footnote {no 5 } in Vernant's article he clarifies this assertion, by saying that at the end of Aeschylus's **Oresteia** , the institution of the human court and the insertion of the Erinyes [ Eumenides ] into the new order of the city do not entirely do away with the contradiction between the ancient gods and the new ones, and between the heroic past of the noble *gene* and the present of the democratic Athens of the fifth century. Certainly, a

balance is achieved, but it rests upon a number of pressures. Conflict remains, in the background, between contrary forces. To this extent the tragic ambiguity is not removed and ambivalence prevails. One should not forget, for example, that a majority of human judges pronounced a vote against Orestes, for it was only Athena's vote that made the two sides equal ( According to Vernant, in Rorty: 48-49 ). Although the questions are raised, no fully satisfactory answers to them are found, and that they remain open.

Vernant points out that resolution without choice, responsibility separated from intention are, we are told, the forms that the will takes among the Greeks. The whole problem lies in knowing what the Greeks themselves understood by choice and the absence of choice and by responsibility, with or without intention. Vernant considers that:

> Our ideas of choice and free choice, of responsibility and intention, are not directly applicable to the ancient mentality any more than our idea of the will is, for in antiquity these notions appear with meanings and forms that are often disconcerting to a modern mind. Aristotle is a particularly significant example in this respect. It is well known that, in his moral philosophy, Aristotle is concerned to refute doctrines according to which the wicked man does not act fully of his own volition but commits his misdeed despite himself. This seems to him in some respects to be the "tragic" concept, represented in particular, in Aristotle's view, by Euripides, whose characters sometimes openly declare that they are not guilty of their crimes since, they claim, they acted despite themselves, under constraint, *bia*, dominated, violently compelled by the force of passions all the more irresstible in that they are incarnations within the heroes themselves of divine powers such as Eros or Aphrodite. (Vernant's **Myth and Tragedy** in Rorty: 40)

George Steiner in his book **The Death of Tragedy** mentions the question of *fate*, included in his definition of what he understands by tragedy and the features of tragic drama. He says that he believes that:

> ...any realistic notion of tragic drama must start from the fact of catastrophe. Tragedies end badly. The tragic personage is *broken by forces which can neither be fully understood nor overcome by rational prudence**. This again is crucial. Where the causes of disaster are temporal, where the conflict can be resolved through technical or social means, we may have serious drama, but not tragedy... tragedy is irreparable... Tragic drama tells us that the spheres of reason, order and justice are terribly limited and that. no progress in our science or technical resources will enlarge their relevance. *Outside and within man is l'autre, the "otherness" of the world. Call it what you will: a hidden or malevolent god, blind fate , the solicitations of hell or the brute fury of our animal blood. It waits for us in ambush at the rossroads. It mocks us and destroys us . In certain rare instances, it leads us after destruction to some incomprehensible repose.** (Steiner: 8-9)

The writer thinks that it is difficult to define and to explain tragedy or tragic drama even though we have a notion of what it means: "...any neat abstract definition would mean nothing. When we say "tragic drama", we know what we are talking about; not exactly, but well enough to recognize the real thing" ( Steiner: 9 ).

Steiner sees the tragic hero as most tragedians do, as the one who keeps his dignity in spite of everything:

> It is a terrible, stark insight into human life. Yet in the very excess of his suffering lies man's claim to dignity. Powerless and broken, a blind beggar hounded out of the city, he assumes a new grandeur. Man is ennobled by the vengeful spite or injustice of the gods. It does not make him innocent, but it hallows him as if he had passed through flame. (Steiner: 9-10 )

Steiner re-evaluates tragedy and says that in the present time, tragedy does not have the same grandeur of the Attic drama; he thinks that tragedy from antiquity until the age of Shakespeare and Racine had an accomplishment within the reach of talent: "...since

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* These italics do not appear in the author's original text , they are my emphasis to denote the stress on fate.

then the tragic voice in drama is blurred or still" ( Steiner:10 ). As he finishes his work he adopts a certain optimism in relation to tragedy and hopes that "finally, there should be present in our minds the possibility - though [he judges it remote] - that the tragic theater may have before it a new life and future" ( Steiner: 354 ). Another important statement by Steiner about tragedy is that modern tragedy, differently from ancient tragedy, seems to rely on a sense of waste ( as in Brecht ) instead of fate. Steiner also approaches his theory on tragedy in his work: **Antígona: una poética y una filosofia de la lectura.**

Having analyzed all the items of tragedy included in Aristotle's **Poetics**, let us see some criticism about the genre of tragedy and about Aristotle's **Poetics**. The genre of tragedy is an interesting subject to many critics and philosophers even in present time. The philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, is among those who interpreted and defined tragedy according to their philosophical views. He considered tragedy and the hero's salvation in terms of the Apollonian / Dionysian polarity which involves the hero's refusal or acceptance of the order ( *Apollo*) or disorder (*Dionysus* ) of the world around and within him.

The development of art is the result of a constant interplay between these two contending elements in the creative life of man : the *Apollonian* and the *Dionysian*. These terms are taken from the names of two gods of ancient Greece: Apollo ( the god of prophecy and patron of the arts) and Dionysus (the god of wine and the vineyards.) Nietzsche views these two mythical figures as the personifications of opposing creative tendencies in man. By constant opposition each stimulates the other to further effort, and the result is the growth of art. But the two tendencies also have a certain dependency upon each other, and in the Greek tragedy, a form widely popular in ancient Greece, a balance

between the two tendencies was achieved.

In **The Birth of Tragedy**, Nietzsche defends his thesis that tragedy is born out of music, and that the decline of true music is the decline of tragedy as well. Both music and images are abstract, but music is an abstract expression of the "heart of man". Concepts and images, on the other hand, are abstract forms of perception, or the "outer shell" of things. Only music (especially that of the composer Wagner ) can give deep significance to images. If the spirit of music is distorted by misguided attempts to imitate the outer world of perception, the significance of art is lost.

Nietzsche says that Greek culture, through the "medicine" of tragedy, attained greatness by coming to an ideal balance between the creative Dionysian force and Apollonian stability. However, the symbol and heart of this balance- tragedy - requires a universal cultural myth. It is through myth, a shared and common Apollonian device, that the Dionysian creative musical spirit can be felt deeply and yet controlled. Tragic myth is "Dionysian wisdom made concrete through Apollonian artifice."

Here we may take another look at the Hellenist Junito de Souza Brandão in **Teatro Grego, Tragédia e Comédia** ( mentioned on page 5 ) and his considerations about tragedy. He acknowledges the fact that tragedy as a genre was conceived in Aristotle's **Poetics**. He begins his work by defining tragedy since its birth in the cult of Dionysus (Brandão: 9). In his work Junito Brandão views the two Aristotelian key words from the Poetics *mimesis* and *katharsis* as "enigmas" because there has not been any kind of consensus in the interpretation of these two terms among the scholars throughout time:

> A definição de Aristóteles, além de distinguir a tragédia da epopéia, possui duas palavras chaves que tantas interpretações têm provocado: basta dizer que até 1928 havia cento e cinqüenta "tomadas de

> posição" em relação à catarse. Isso mostra sobretudo o desespero , diante do enigma da "mimesis" ( imitação) e da katharsis (purificação). (Brandão: 12)[34]

This chapter concludes the first and theoretical part of the dissertation. The following sections of this present work will be dedicated to a detailed study of three representativeplaywrights of ancient Greek tragedy: Aeschylus, with his trilogy, The **Oresteia**, Sophocles with his play **Electra**, and Euripides with two plays, **Electra** and **Orestes** .The Greek playwrights will be the main subject- matter of part one of the Reflective Analysis. The second part of this reflective section will be dedicated to a study of the modern American playwright Eugene O'Neill, with his play **Mourning Becomes Electra**, in order to point out similarities and differences between the two kinds of tragedy: the ancientGreek and the modern ones. The reflective analyses will be based on the two former theoretical sections on myth, on tragedy and on Aristotle's **Poetics**.

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[34] Translation: "Aristotle's definition , besides distinguishing tragedy from the epic genre , possesses two key words that have raised many interpretations : in 1928 there were a hundred and fifty interpretations of catharsis . This shows not only but especifically the despair of facing the enigma of "mimesis (imitation) and of Kátharsis - purification . The author presents a deep study of three playwrights , beginning with Aeschylus to be the theater of inevitable catastrophes and his characters are considered more heroes than men (Brandão:17) . In the section on Sophocles , Brandão says that Sophocles made of his tragedy the normal development of the will of the character in a determined situation . He considers Sophocles'theater anthropocentric as fate is committed by man in the light of his will ( Brandão: 42-43 ) . In the Euripides'section , Brandão says that the last Greek tragedian conceives tragedy as a práxis of man acting in a profound dichotomy between the world of gods and the world of men.

## Part II - Electra and Eugene O'Neill

### 1- Greek versions of the Electra Myth

Myth, even though is ancient in its origin, still constitutes today a form of contemporary expression and its various possibilities of use are important in the literary as well as in the psychological universe. Myth has been revived and revised in modern tragedy in its various forms. In the Greek plays themselves, what we now call "the myth" has been subject to real variation. The most evident example is precisely Electra, for if we compare the **Oresteia** of Aeschylus, the **Electra** of Sophocles and the **Electra** of Euripides, we will find radical differences not only of detail but of experience.

In the **Oresteia**, the emphasis is on the pollution of the house by the murder of Agamemnon; Electra greets Orestes not only as the cleanser but the unifier - the son who carries, through the bitter difficulties of the action, the loving ( kingship ) relations of a disrupted household. The greatest difficulty is the need to cleanse and to re- establish the house by its own norms, and the consequent relation which the inevitable matricide has to these norms and to other conceptions of justice.

In Sophocles, the emphasis is much more on the personal feelings of Electra and Orestes; the motive of Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon is in the same way personalized; it is not only a chain of events in the history of the house, but a compounded husband- murder and adultery; the reaction is then of a son and a daughter, as well as of an avenging and cleansing generation.

In Euripides, the emphasis has again shifted; Electra is married to a peasant/ farmer, and the vengeance and murder come as if from a different dimension, a tragedy necessary but with a degree of bitterness and malignity breaking into an apparently settled life. In each of these cases it is not just detail that is altered; it is the dramatic meaning of the experience.

It is then not possible to abstract a single "orthodox" meaning of the "myth". When we look then at contemporary examples of plays based on these "myths", we shall, when we find variations, not be measuring them against an orthodoxy, though the taking of a relatively familiar story legitimately draws attention to the particular emphasis that is given. There is often a critical difficulty, in that we have to attend to the emphasis, but cannot criticize it through the myth; each play's action stands in its own right. But then, at the same time, the action has to justify itself in its own right. Where it fails to do so, no defense is available by pointing to the "myth": that is a stratagem of the same order as writing a play wholly about contemporary experience. There is also a very fine line between the use of myth and its exploitation.

Due to the variations of action and emphasis found in the three Greek versions of the myth of Electra, each play will be seen separately in order to be analyzed in the light of the characteristics of tragedy found in Aristotle's **Poetics**. There will be also an attempt to find parallels and similarities/ differences with the modern version of the Electra myth to be discussed later to apply all the tragic Greek plays studied to O'Neill's modern version of tragedy in study, **Mourning Becomes Electra**.

### 1.1 - Aeschylus' "Oresteia"

Following the chronological order we will start with the Aeschylean trilogy - the **Oresteia**. In modern times, the Oresteian trilogy has rightly been accorded a place among the greatest achievements of the human mind. The basis of this trilogy is a story which, like many great stories, grew gradually into shape through several centuries; a story compounded of facts and imagination , reflecting the experience, beliefs and aspirations of a vital society, and blending within itself the poetry of common life and the vision of the prophet. It is a long story, and has been told very often. It begins with remote truth and ends with documented history.

In order to start discussing the play one has to begin with the story of the "Guénos" inherited by the Atridas brothers - Thyestes and Atreus.

One of the most powerful Greek cities in the second millenium B.C. was Argos, in the Peloponnese. Two brothers, Atreus and Thyestes, descended through Pelops from Tantalus (who, like Prometheus, feasted with gods and was punished for betraying their secrets), had quarrelled about the succession to the throne of Argos; moreover, Thyestes had seduced Atreus' wife. Atreus reckoned that the score would be settled once and for all if he could trick Thyestes into committing some unclean or sacrilegious act which would render him permanently taboo in the eyes of the Argive citizens. He secretly murdered Thyestes' two young sons , and served their flesh to Thyestes at a banquet. Thyestes went into exile and died there; but he had a third son, an infant called Aegisthus, whom he took with him and brought back into exile.

Atreus himself got away with murder; but such debts are not forgotten. His eldest

son, Agamemnon, inherited the throne of Argos, and with it the curse that had settled on the family. His brother Menelaus later became king of Sparta in succession to his father-in- law Tyndareos. In the plays of Euripides we find Menelaus as an unpleasant character; but in the **Oresteia** ( though he does not appear ), he seems to command the love and loyalty of Argive citizens almost equally with Agamemnon.

Menelaus as a young man had been one among a great number of noble Greeks who had haunted the palace of Tyndareos, king of Sparta. Tyndareos'wife Leda had been loved by Zeus, who visited her in the form of a Swan. Leda bore Zeus twin daughters: Helen and Clytemnestra (Both are often called "daughters of Tyndareos"; but whereas Helen is often called "daughter of Zeus", Clytemnestra's divine parentage is seldom referred to). Helen's extraordinary beauty attracted innumerable suitors and aroused such emotions that they all entered into a mutual pact: each man swore that he would accept Helen's choice as final and offer his armed service to the husband, should his possession of her ever be threatened. By what principle, instinct, or calculation Helen was led to choose Menelaus will remain one of the delightful puzzles of history. He was a good fighter, a man of few words and little wit.

Agamemnon's character is clearer and more defined, especially in his participation in the **Iliad** . He was "every inch a king ;" and he would have liked to be a thoroughgoing tyrant, but in general recognized the necessity for compromise with inferiors. His resentment at having to compromise was shown in a readiness to deceive on occasion; and himself arose from a deep- rooted weakness of will, and lack of confidence in his own authority. It was Agamemnon's inevitable fate to marry Helen's sister

Clytemnestra .

Clytemnestra is the most powerful figure in the **Oresteia**; one of the most powerful, indeed, in all dramatic literature; but this figure is very largely the imaginative creation of Aeschylus. Other writers of his period, whose works are lost to us, may have contributed something; but Homer gives only an insufficient statement of the one act for which she was universally known, that she plotted with her lover to murder her husband. He neither examines her motives nor describes her character. When, however, we meet Clytemnestra in the **Oresteia**, we find her as vivid and fully developed a personality as the great heroes of the **Iliad**. She is the only character who appears in all three plays. ( In the last play of the trilogy the **Eumenides** she "appears"as a constant absent presence ) Clearly Aeschylus intends her part in the drama to be significant.

In the saga of the Trojan war, the starting point is Paris 's visit to Sparta: King Priam of Troy sent his youngest son, Paris, as ambassador to Sparta; there he was entertained by Clytemnestra's sister Helen. Menelaus, with what seems to have been his normal stupidity, found it necessary to sail to Crete on state business and leave Helen and Paris alone. The goddess Aphrodite fulfilled her promise ( she had promised Paris the love of the most beautiful woman on earth ). When Menelaus returned, he called upon all those who had been his fellow- suitors to fulfil their promises, and aid him in pursuing Helen to Troy and burning to the ground that barrier of Oriental lust and treachery. There was an almost universal response to his appeal, and Agamemnon was made commander - in - chief of a vast army and fleet which assembled at Aulis, a bay sheltered by the island of Euboca on the east coast of Greece.

When everything was ready for the start, the wind changed to the north. The usual fair - wind sacrifices failed to have their effect. Days lengthened into months , and still northerly gales kept the fleet harbour- bound, till food- supplies became an acute problem. At length the prophet Calchas pronounced that the anger of the virgin goddess Artemis must be appeased by the sacrifice of Agamemnon's virgin daughter Iphigenia. Agamemnon protested, and was censured by his fellow- kings with great protest and indifference. In the end he wrote to Clytemnestra saying he had arranged for his daughter to be married to Achilles, and commanded her to be sent to Aulis. Iphigenia came and was duly slaughtered. The wind veered and the fleet set sail. In the ninth year of the siege, Paris was killed in battle. In the tenth Troy was captured by the device of the wooden horse; all adult males were killed, the women and children enslaved , and the city reduced to ashes.

The play **Agamemnon** opens in Argos a few hours after the capture of Troy; and its climax is the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra on his return to the city. In **the Choephoroi**, Agamemnon's son, Orestes, returns to Argos at Apollo's command to avenge his father. He kills both Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus, and departs pursued by the Furies. Finally in the **Eumenides**, Orestes stands his trial before Athena, and the Athenian court of Aeropagus. The Furies accuse him, Apollo defends him; the mortal votes are evenly divided; and Athena gives her casting vote for his absolution. The Furies at first threaten Athens with plagues, but are at last persuaded by Athena to accept a home and a position of honor in her city. Such is the bare outline of the three plays of the trilogy; and they will be discussed in more detail later; but first it is necessary to give a

brief account of the history and the ideas which form the background of the trilogy.

In the 800 years between the fall of Troy and the rise of Athens, Greek social and political life underwent many changes. Each city and island for the most part maintained its independence; sometimes one city or group of cities was more powerful, sometimes another (Based on Ferguson , **Greek Tragedy** : 64 -116).

Periods of prosperity and peace, by reducing the necessity for a unified command in the hands of a king, gradually transferred power from the kings to the nobles to rich merchants- who had risen by trade from the ranks of the peasants. By the seventh and sixth centuries merchants of outstanding ability or good luck established themselves in many cities as tyrants; and these tyrants tended to pay tribute to the powerful empire of Persia. About the end of the 6th century, a great movement for freedom resulted in the expulsion of most of the Greek tyrants and the establishment of democratic institutions. The last tyrant of Athens was expelled in 510 B.C. He was with the Persian expedition which in 490 B.C. was utterly defeated by the Athenians at Marathon.

The plays of Aeschylus were all written within some thirty years after the battle of Marathon, while the new Athenian democracy was bursting into full life, and preparing with boundless confidence to take upon itself the leadership of the Greek world. Aeschylus and his contemporaries had spent their youth amidst tyrannies, revolutions, and wars. They were now called upon to govern, to judge, and to legislate. The new moral responsibility of the ordinary citizens was fully accepted and deeply felt. No important burden was delegated either to aristocrats or to officials; the citizens themselves decided in person, by a majority vote, all judicial and political questions. One problem, therefore occupied their

minds insistently: what is justice? What is the relation of justice to vengeance? Can justice be reconciled with the demands of religion, the force of human feeling, the intractability of fate?

It is obvious that the major theme of the **Oresteia** is justice - *Dikê* - the cosmic principle of order which governs the dealings of gods and mortals and whose dictates man ignores to his cost . The chorus of the first play of the trilogy warns: "Justice scales weigh wisdom through suffering" ( lines 250-251) and again: "There is no assistance for the man... who kicks *Dikê's* great altar into the shadow "( 381-384). Each of the three plays, in its own way, exemplifies these propositions; one by one the main characters are shown kicking down Justice's altar, and being made to suffer through an understanding of the magnitude of their crime.

But the term *Dikê* has a kind of ambiguity in the Greek culture and one may ask what kind of Justice is this word referring to: to the justice of gods or to the justice of men. In precisely this ambiguity Aeschylus found the means of solving the problem he had set himself: the justice of the gods could only become efficacious for men in this world through the workings of Law. By the end of the trilogy the legal sense predominates as the audience witnesses an actual trial at the Areopagus .( Brandão , **Teatro Grego**: 9 -35)

This problem was complicated for the contemporaries of Aeschylus by the fact that religion spoke with a divided voice. There were indeed two religions inextricably mixed: the old and the new. The old religion, deriving from the period before the advent of Zeus and the Olympians, was in origin probably a worship of the dead, and therefore was concerned with placating the powers that live under the earth, the "chthonian gods"( from

*chthon-* the earth ). The earth itself has, naturally, always been thought of as a female, and other female deities were worshipped as well, such as the Fates and the Furies, and Themis, goddess of justice and order, the mother of Prometheus, whom Aeschylus identifies with Earth. The religious rites of the Eleusian mysteries were also connected with this older religion, for they centred round the worship of Demeter, goddess of crops (the name means "mother earth") and her daughter Persephone, who was queen of the lower world. The Eleusian rites however were mainly joyful in character, while the worship of chothonian powers was more generally associated with fear and mourning. The worship of the Olympians, on the other hand, was always an occasion of enjoyment and dancing, athletic and dramatic performances, and feasting were its natural modes of expression.

Legend describes the rite of the new religion in terms of a "theomachy" or the battle of gods, in which Zeus and the Olympians overcame Cronos and the gods of the earth. History connects it with the invasion of Greece, some time in the fifteenth century B.C. by a "tribe" from the north of Europe who called themselves Achaean and whose gods were closely related to the Nordic gods who figure in early English legend. These armed and organized invaders easily conquered the indigenous tribes, built themselves walled cities, and established dynasties, laws and military traditions. The old order was not simply abolished, many of its cults and customs remained, and some of the older deities were still universally honoured. So by a whole series of expedient compromises the two religions flourished side by side, their opposite character giving scope for a wide variety of personal preference in religious practice. It seems probable however that essential

differences between the two religions made themselves strongly felt from time to time and in the middle of the sixth century, Pisiastres, "tyrant" of Athens, did his best to strengthen the Olympian cults by the building of temples, by the establishment of the Panathenaic Festival of which more will be said in connection with the **Eumenides**, and by encouraging the circulation and public recitation of the Homeric poems. Nonetheless, the old cults remained vital and popular, and their rivalry with the official religion was still keenly felt in the time of Aeschylus. The question of the relation to vengeance was also the question of the relation of Zeus to the Chthonian gods (Kitto, **The Greeks**: 219-236).

Pre-Olympian religion would roughly equate justice with vengeance; and the Furies'vengeance was to punish three major sins; blasphemy against the gods, treachery to a host or guest, and the shedding of kindred blood. From very early times these sins were felt to threaten the basis of human society, and therefore to bring a curse on the community which tolerated them. Thus the Furies, in hounding such sinners away from their homes, performed an essential and universal service; and for this they were honoured as Eumenides ( the name of the third play of Aeschylus' trilogy ), or **kindly ones**, though the name certainly represented a desire to appease as well as a desire to honour. Their horrible aspect and relentless cruelty become the safeguard of cities. But Aeschylus shows clearly that their principles are inconsistent and unsatisfactory; for while they will punish a son who does not avenge his father, and punish equally a son who kills his mother, they will ignore the guilt of a wife who kills her husband; because he is not her blood- relation. This is an intolerable position; as Apollo points out, it implies a contempt for the marriage - bond; it also shows that the Furies act not only by a blind rule of a thumb, but are

incapable of dealing properly with a special case like that of Orestes.

More than that, as far as the Furies are concerned, a single murder may lead to an insoluble feud and an endless series of murders in successive generations. In larger terms, then, the old religion is no safe moral guide in urgent situations which involve life and death; the quest for justice must then receive solution from the chothonian gods.

The next source from which a reliable moral sanction may be sought is Apollo, who speaks through his oracle at Delphi. For many hundreds of years, since before the advent of Zeus, cities and individuals from every part of Greece, when faced with perplexing problems, moral or political, had commonly sent to consult this oracle; and the college of priests who administered it had acquired a unique position of influence in the whole Greek world, so that in any quarrel between states the support of Delphi might prove decisive . Just as the Hebrew law of the Old Testament, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" imposed an exact limit on the indiscriminate vengeance of primitive savagery, so the Delphic code enjoined the taking of life for life by the next of kin to a murdered man, and then offered to purify the avenger through ritual cleansing, and so avoid further murders and an endless feud. But this principle, though preferable to the blind and unlimited operation of the Furies, is still unsatisfactory. Acting upon it, Apollo instructs Orestes to kill his mother, an act which Orestes himself abhors as deeply as everyone who hears of it, as an offense against the tenderest of all natural affections. Apollo's code in the instance proves barbaric; and the barbaric basis of it is made very clear by Apollo himself when, in the opening scene of **The Eumenides**, he abuses those repellent beings whom he had himself used ( see **Choephoroi**: 113, Penguin edition ) as a

threat to compel Orestes to carry out his command. Aeschylus shows that the quest for justice can hope for no final solution from Apollo and the principle of vengeance.

As **Agamemnon** is dominated by relentless fate, The **Choephoroi** by the command of Apollo, so The **Eumenides** presents the true justice of the goddess Athena, expressed in the authority and wisdom of an established court of law, the Athenian Areopagus. In bringing on to the stage this Athenian institution as a body founded by Athena herself for the purpose of trying Orestes on a charge of murder, Aeschylus achieves two purposes. First, as an ultimate solution of the deepest moral problems, he holds up something which we might describe as embodying the Athenian way of life, in contrast to the primitive ideas of the old religion and the inadequate compromise of the "Delphic code". But at the same time he deals with an important political question of the time.

For the last 130 years, since the constitution of Solon ( about 592 B.C. ) the Areopagus ( so called because it met on the "hill of Ares" ) had held a dominating position in the political life of Athens. Its power over every aspect of community life was considerable; and as its members were life- members, their practice tended to become reactionary. Within a generation after the battle of Marathon the progressive democracy of the Athenian Assembly had decided to abolish this restriction of freedom. In 426 B.C., the Areopagus had been deprived of all its powers except that of jurisdiction in cases of homicide. The revolutionary change had aroused intense feeling among both supporters and opponents. The position of the court of Areopagus was guarded by strong religious sanctions. The **Eumenides**, whose function was closely connected with the judicial

powers of this court, had an immemorial shrine in a cavern at the foot of the same hill, and thus represented the guardianship of the chthonian gods. The Areopagites were recruted from the most wealthy Athenian classes. Thus the propertied aristocracy found themselves allied with the old fashioned country folk in indignation at the radical dispossessing of their "House of Lords". A democratic leader named Ephialtes framed the resolution and carried out the reform; he was murdered not long afterwards, and his murderer was never discovered.

It is to the tension caused by this dispute that Aeschylus addresses himself in the second half of the **Eumenides**. He asserts that the Areopagus from its foundation was not a political executive, but a judicial court. He states its divine sanction in the highest possible terms; and by showing the Eumenides as yielding ultimately to Athena's patient persuasion, and accepting both the equal judgment of the Areopagites and Athena's casting vote, he pleads for a reasonable spirit of accommodation. When at the end of the play, agreement is at last reached, those present on the stage are joined by a number of men and women of all ages, and children, who form a procession immediately recognizable as the great Panathenaic procession, the culminating event of the four- yearly Panathenaic Festival. A further link between past and present is found in the fact that one feature of the Panatheinac procession was a numerous contingent of the "resident aliens" who had found a home in Athens, and now the Eumenides are welcomed by the name of "resident aliens"- an honorable name, for Athenians prided themselves on the liberal welcome they extended to immigrants from other cities. Thus the grand drama of justice is made to end in the glorification of Athens and her supreme judicial court, in the

reconciliation of the old order with the new, of tradition with progress, of fate with Zeus. And this final mention of Zeus as lord of the new dispensation inaugurated by Athena is made in such a way as to remind us that at various points throughout the whole tragedy the name of Zeus has been associated also with the earliest phase of man's development towards a proper understanding of justice; with the unbending primitive law - the "doer must suffer"- as well as with the sympathetic wisdom of Athena. The Furies, who derived their authority from Fate, yet were from the beginning the instruments of Zeus, have changed to the Eumenides, the kind ones, and now take their places as embodying that ultimate sanction of fear which underlies the new order, as it dominated the old.

There is a second great question which Aeschylus considers in the **Oresteia**; and it concerns the central figure of Clytemnestra. She is first mentioned, by the watchman, as a woman with a man's will. In her first appearance with the Elders when she has ended her speech with "these are a woman's words", they reply: "Madam, your words are like a man's".

Clytemnestra was right about the message of the beacons, and the Elders were wrong. When the herald arrives , she shocks them into subservience by the boldness of her lying. Confronted with her proud forbidding husband, who with crushing bitterness tells her not to make a woman of him, she takes the man's part and imposes her will. However, in the play she is defeated: she cannot wrest a word from Cassandra. When the murder is done, she rails at the elders, whose unmanly indecision had been taken incoherently while the king died, for still treating her as a thoughtless woman; and speaks of the man she has chosen for her shield, Aegisthus - who is called "woman" by the Elders, and by Orestes in

the next play. Her status as a wife has been touched by both Chrysus and Cassandra, but that, though talked incoherently enough, is of minor importance, since convention allowed a soldier his concubine.

Clytemnestra's tragedy both began and ended with the outrage of motherhood, first when Iphigenia was taken from her and then when Orestes killed her . In the climax of the **Eumenides**, the trial - scene, we have a long argument between Apollo and the Furies on the respective rights and status of a man and a woman in marriage and parenthood; and a brief but emphatic argument on the rival claims to freedom of a husband and a wife which also finds a place at the climactic moment of the **Choephorie**, just before Orestes kills his mother. Clearly the relation of man and woman in marriage must be considered, after the "quest for justice!", as the second great theme of the trilogy. The question remains in what form was this matter was felt as a living issue in Aeschylus' day.

Athenian society of that period gave to woman a somewhat equivocal status, of which a good description is to be found in Kitto's book **The Greeks** ( Penguin Books: 219- 236 ), though he perhaps over- estimates the happiness that women derived from their assumed privileges. When Aeschylus was born, the personal liberty and social and political responsibility of every male citizen had increased immensurably, and in this exhilarating expansion women had very little share. Yet the personal qualities, which in man, produced the greatness of Athens must certainly have been present in women, and denied proper expression, can only have engendered the poison of resentment and perverted ambition . A generation after Aeschylus, Euripides spoke explicitly for Clytemnestra, implying that she satisfied her indignation by murder . There were

"Clytemnestras" in Athenian society in the fifth century, and a study of extant low- court speeches might suggest some names. Aeschylus does not justify his murderers as Euripides justifies his Medea or Ibsen his Hedda Gabler; but he reiterates the dangerous anomalies which must occur when, in a social framework giving every freedom to men and none to women, a passionate and strong - willed wife confronts a weak but arrogant husband. Many Athenian marriages doubtless were based on love and some degree of personal equality, and gave scope to the wife to use her gifts and intelligence; but a woman whose marriage was less fortunate had no escape, and she was imprisoned in a position which denied her a due measure of freedom and respect. The goddess Athene in the **Eumenides** gives her vote to Orestes because in all things she is on the father's side; that is to say, in this Athenian society she represents that which must be a man- governed society. In such a society men are responsible for assuming a dominant position in relation to women.

Clytemnestra, then, is not merely a murderess, the horrifying instrument of pitiless justice. She is also the mother of Iphigenia, and, in that character, "a symbol of all the wives and mothers who suffer from the inferior status of the women in marriage (**Coephorie**: 126 - "So to this day... our whole sex is cursed, by men disfranchised, scorned and portionless ." ) She is driven to her murderous act, not only by her love of Aegisthus, her hatred of Agamemnon and her jealousy of Cassandra; the deepest spring of her tragedy is the knowledge that she , who has it in her to be the head of a kingdom if need be, as well as the head of a family, can be freely ignored as a wife and outraged as a mother by a man she knows to be her inferior. She thus confronts the Athenians with a

problem which it is evident that hey have not solved.

The other problem, however, the quest for justice in the relationship of citizen to citizen, which is, if not completely solved, at last shown to be within reach of solution through the wisdom of Athena, as expressed in the democratic constitution which Aeschylus' fellow citizens had evolved.

Aeschylus had some reason for feeling that in the democracy of his day the political and social feuds and struggles of centuries, all conducted in the name of justice on one side at least, and often on both, had at last achieved their end; that the Athenian state offered a hopeful approach to every moral problem of society. His treatment of the theme of feud and reconciliation in the **Oresteia** suggests that he saw the same principle at work in history. He expresses it in two statements which recur in various forms: *The doer must suffer and by suffering man learns*. These are laws of fate, and even Zeus must obey them. Zeus learned in time to compromise with Prometheus and abandon absolute tyranny. So *man too learns in the end the folly of misdoing , though it may take several generations of suffering to drive the lessons home* ( the Guénos ) And the lesson which suffering teaches is not merely how to avoid suffering; it is how to do right, how to achieve justice. That is made clear in the third choral ode in **Agamemnon**. Similarly in the second ode - the story of Paris, his proud willingness, his long defiance and final overthrow, illustrates the slow but sure working of a moral universe, and prepares our minds to witness the same principle at work nearer home, in the family of Agamemnon.

The sin of Atreus has to be expiated by his son; but the son, too, commits sin by sacrificing his own daughter, and thus doubly justifies the *fate* which is prepared for him.

Orestes is bound by immemorial tradition to exact vengeance for his murdered father; but his deed, even by the primitive standards of the old religion, is a still worse crime than that which he has avenged. In the end reconciliation is achieved. Just as Prometheus suffered for a thousand years, and then came to terms with Zeus; so Orestes suffers torment at the hands of the Furies, and is at last granted release. Thus out of sin and struggle, revenge and atonement, there appears at last a new phase in man's quest for justice.

Thus, the trilogy ends on a note of hopefulness and confidence; and in the final procession of the Eumenides, Aeschylus, as it were, hands over to his fellow-citizens the issue of man's perpetual struggle against sin and vengeance, and leaves with them the mystery of suffering and free will . But the note of hopefulness is only the last note of a long and tragic tune, of which we learn the refrain in **Agamemnon** : "Cry sorrow, sorrow-yet let good prevail!" The prayer answers the cry ; but cry and prayer are both always present in the music of humanity . The prayer expresses a long hope for the future , inspired by contemplation of a long period of past suffering . Each man as philosopher or patriot may live by hope, but in his own flesh and spirit he knows neither past nor future , only the present. Though philosophy and patriotism end the drama on a hopeful note , human suffering and despair fill the more memorable scenes. The joy of the final chorus does not refute the realism of Cassandra's parting words "and grief itself 's hardly more pitiable than joy ".

For it is only on rare occasions, such as the witnessing of transcendent drama in a unique religious setting , that men are raised by communion of emotion to regard life with the eyes of philosophers. Life itself is lived day by day, and suffering is not sublimated or

dramatized but endured. The hopefulness of Aeschylus belongs partly to those in every age who have the philosopher's vision, but his despair, his knowledge of suffering and his courage - this is what makes his poetry as true for us as it was for his Athenians; for a large part of truth is necessarily tragic, and tragedy, the greatest of the literary arts, was the creation of Aeschylus.

**Agamemnon**, the first play of the trilogy **Oresteia**, opens with a brief scene in which a watchman posted on the palace roof by Clytemnestra sees the beacons which announce the capture of Troy. There are two notes in his speech; *hope* because Agamemnon may now be expected home; and *foreboding*, because of the unfaithfulness of the wife who awaits him. Then comes a long lyric passage in which the Chorus ( elders of Argos ), express the same mixed feeling, with stronger emphasis on premonition ( *fate* ). It is not only Clytemnestra who arouses their fear- they trust Agamemnon to find a way to deal with her when he returns; but they know that the king himself is burdened with grief. They recount in detail how Agamemnon, inheriting the family curse ( the *fate* ) from Atreus, found himself faced with a fearful dilemma, and made the wrong choice - to sacrifice his daughter. They point out that Fate is not absolute: Fate confronts man with a choice, and if man chooses wrongly the sin is his.

Clytemnestra now comes to tell them that Troy is captured, and answers their incredulity with a description of the series of lanterns she had posted to span a distance of some 400 miles. The Elders listen politely; and carried away by her eloquence, seem to believe that her news is true. Then in a long choral Ode, they trace the hand of Zeus, which has revealed itself in so notable a punishment of sin - the sin of Paris in seducing

Helen. From this sin has resulted, first, the utter destruction of the city and people of Troy; but the chorus describe a secondary result, the sorrows they have known in Argos, the grief of the deserted king, Menelaus, and the resentment of the people of Greece at the slaughter of their men in a foreign war. Agamemnon will not come home to an easy situation. Success and glory are in themselves a danger. In the end, discouraged by this recurrence of foreboding, they reflect how improbable is Clytemnestra's story of the lanterns, and decide to think no more of it.

Here an interval takes place, representing the lapse of some days. The Chorus reassemble when Agamemnon's herald arrives to announce his master's return. He describes the hardships of ten years, and the disastrous storms of the homeward voyage. The third choral Ode speaks of the beauty of Helen, and the terrible *curse* which followed her to Troy. But that *curse* expressed not the gods 'envy of mortal happiness, but their anger at mortal sin. Troy fell because, in the person of Paris, she sinned against the holy law which commands mutual trust and respect between host and guest. By refusing to give Helen back, Troy took this sin upon herself, and suffered for it. The Chorus are so deeply occupied with applying the law of retribution to Paris, that they forget the theme of the first Ode ; its application to Agamemnon has faded from their minds, as the victorious king enters in his chariot, followed by a second chariot containing spoils of war, and Cassandra, the captive princess of Troy.

The Elders greet Agamemnon; and try, without being specific, to warn him that he may receive a welcome less genuine than theirs. He replies in a tone of some self-satisfaction; and then Clytemnestra appears. Her speeches in this scene are packed with

discretion. Her welcome is fulsome in its protestation of love. Her reference to his ten years' absence, which should have sounded like a tender expression of sorrow, by a slight shift of emphasis becomes a bitter accusation of neglect . Every sentence is calculated to cause Agamemnon uneasiness, yet give him no shadow of excuse for expressing it. She insists on one theme - Agamemnon's death - and the many deaths that rumor had given him in his absence. The eagerness with which she has awaited him is extravagantly drawn; and its effect is, as she intended, to awake distaste rather than suspicion. Then she calls upon her maids to spread a carpet of purple cloth from the chariot to the palace door, to receive the feet of the conqueror.

Agamemnon, in reply, insults his wife loudly and reprimands her for thus inviting the jealousy of the gods to fall on him. She accepts this without any hint of resentment, and argues with a flood of two-faced imagery which rouses in the audience an uneasiness as great as Agamemnon 's. The sea, she says, is an inexhaustible source of purple dye; and Agamemnon can well afford to tread on expensive cloth . But the "sea" she speaks of is the family feud, inexhaustible in hate; the "purple dye" is blood shed for revenge; the "one flowing", the "safe journey's end", are alike ambiguous. The "unripe grape" is an expression also used for a "young virgin", and therefore means Iphigenia, from whose death springs the wrath of Zeus against her father; "coolness" may be either a shelter from the heat, or the chill of death; and "perfected" is the word used of an unblemished victim upon which all the rites preliminary to sacrifice have been performed. But Agamemnon, self- confident and contemptuous, listens without understanding.

Meanwhile Clytemnestra's maids have draped the floor and the steps with purple.

Agamemnon refuses to set foot upon it. Clytemnestra persuades him, suggesting he is afraid. At last he graciously yields, has his boots removed by a slave, and treads on the purple cloth. Clytemnestra utters a piercing and terrifying cry of triumph, ostensibly to celebrate the king's victorious return, actually to mark the moment when she feels her own victory is assured. Again she has caused uneasiness, mounting to momentary terror, in the elders, until her apparent meaning convinces them; only Cassandra knows her real meaning. The king enters his palace. Clytemnestra remains behind for a brief prayer to Zeus, asking that he will bring her designs to fulfillment; then she too goes in.

This is a significant episode. By persuading Agamemnon against his better judgement to walk on purple to the altar where he himself is to be the "perfected" victim, Clytemnestra achieves three things. The first thing is that she demonstrates her personal ascendancy over her husband; however he may disguise his weakness, he knows that he is in her hands. But his yielding is not only stupidity; it is sin ( *Fatal Flaw).* To a Greek the essence of piety was humility, the conscious acknowledgement that the gods are greater than man, and that man's greatness is held by his sufferance. Agamemnon in his first speech had arrogantly allowed Heaven a share in his glory as conqueror; to walk on purple would symbolize his appropriation of the whole glory of victory, and be a visible defiance of the gods. It is the kingly ambition of his nature which tempts him to make this visible claim before his wife and his subjects; it is his weakness that admits the momentary pretence, which he knows to be false, that such pride can escape divine anger. The second thing, then, that Clytemnestra achieves is the planting of conscious guilt in his heart. He is about to approach an altar of pray; and he will pray knowing that he addresses an offended

deity. The third thing is the most important of all: this action demonstrates to Argos, and to the audience, that the man whose fall we are to witness is self- doomed; that he is by nature the kind of man who cannot survive in a world ruled by just and holy powers; that he is one whom the gods must inevitably destroy ( *Agamemnon's fate*).

The Chorus, left alone, are now thoroughly aroused by the sense of impending catastrophe. One may ask the question if evil can be avoided, and we could think affirmatively if the one who is about to commit evil, or to fall into it, is ready to pay due respect to the gods. But the king's lack of respect reminds them again that he is already in debt for the blood of his own daughter. For the first time a suspicion of the truth touches them; but they dare not name so horrible a thing. At this point we are surprised by the reappearance of Clytemnesatra, who comes to call on Cassandra to take her place with the rest of the household at the ritual cleansing that is about to be observed. Cassandra appears neither to see nor to hear her; and the queen retires, leaving the Elders to deal with her.

They already know her reputation as a prophetess. They now learn that this power was given her by Apollo himself, after she had promised to return his love. When she broke her promise, Apollo in anger doomed her to be always a true prophet and always disbelieved; but he still respected her virginity. At the fall of Troy Agamemnon asked for Cassandra as his share of the loot; and what Apollo left untouched, Agamemnon violated.

Cassandra trembles, possessed by the prophet-god. She speaks of Thyestes' banquet, and sees the walls of the palace still dripping blood. She sees Agamemnon's

death, and the sword in Clytemnestra's grasp, and describes her vision in lurid pictorial flashes which the Elders will not or dare not understand. She sees her own body lying dead beside the king's and weeps for her own pitiful fate; and still the Chorus are obtuse, though sympathetic. Then abandoning lyrical utterance, she makes a supreme effort to control herself and speak clearly, in the ordinary blank verse of dialogue. She moves nearer to simple statement, and at last declares that Agamemnon will lie dead before everyone's eyes.

Immediately Apollo's *curse* operates: The Elders, who were previously inclined to belief, retreat in panic from the plain truth. Cassandra turns from them to address Apollo, whom she accuses and defies as her destroyer, shattering and expelling the sacred emblem with which he had invested her as his prophetess. She foretells the further progress of the curse, Orestes'vengeance upon Clytemnestra, and, with a prayer for a quick death, and a short despairing elegy on all human happiness, goes into the palace.

Soon after, the death- scream of the king is heard; the Elders debate rapidly what to do; and the palace doors open to reveal Clytemnestra standing over the bleeding corpses of Agamemnon and Cassandra.

The impact of Clytemnestra 's exultant and defiant realism as she claims the butchery for her own "handiwork" cannot be paralleled in power by anything in ancient drama. A long altercation follows; as it proceeds, we begin at last to see behind the protective covering of ferocity something of bitter suffering which has festered within her since Iphigenia was taken from her and killed; and also something of the weariness which the strain of revenge has left behind. Clytemnestra may be a "monster", but she is also a

woman. The Chorus is forced to admit that, though it must condemn her act, it cannot see where truth and justice lie and, at this point, to complicate still further the despairing search for justice, Aegisthus enters, and with his first words offers thanks to the just gods.

Aegisthus 'character is described for us by the Elders as that of a coward who would not go with Agamemnon to war, a degenerate who seduced the king's wife, and a coward who allowed a woman to use the sword against the enemy. One must also look at the lines Aeschylus has given him to speak. His statements are free from self praise and from pretence, and his description of events is objective, One should notice, however, that when he speaks of the banishment of Thyestes by Atreus he omits to mention the reason, his seduction of Atreus' wife. As to the rest, he makes no claim to be a hero but, as he relates (with a passionate precision which cannot fail to win some sympathy) the terrible story of what Agamemnon's father did to his father, Thyestes, we realize that the filial obligation which drove him to plot vengeance on the son of Atreus is exactly the same as that which now lies upon Orestes and which we shall see Orestes fulfill in the next play. There is, then, no point in labeling Aegisthus a coward because he did not go to fight in Agamemnon's war. The other two charges, of course, remain but we should ask if they constitute a worse crime than matricide, or if they are worse than the crime which Aegisthus has to avenge. The Chorus itself admits that, unlike Clytemnestra, he refrains from insulting the dead king. His appeal is to justice, and his resolve is to rule. Aeschylus does not praise or excuse Aegisthus; but his insistence on presenting his case fairly ensures that the urgency of the central theme - the discovery of what justice really is - is still further heightened by the closing scene of the play. Challenged by the Elders, Aegisthus

makes a show of force, Clytemnestra implores for restraint, and the Elders withdraw, shouting threats and defiance.

The second play of the trilogy - **The Choephorie** or **The Libation Bearers** begins after eight years have passed since the death of Agamemnon. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus have ruled over Argos firmly. The people are subjugated and resentful. Clytemnestra's daughter, Electra, who some time before Agamemnon's return transferred Orestes safely from Argos and sent him to relatives in Phocis, has continued to defy her mother, and is now reduced to a condition of life hardly different from that of a slave. Unmarried, She lives in the hope of Orestes' return. Agamemnon's body, negleted and without funeral honors, lies under a plain mound of earth outside the city walls.

The text of the opening speech is defective, but its direction is clear. Orestes, now a man, is standing, in the early dawn, at his father's tomb, seeking his aid and blessing in the duty of revenge which he has returned to undertake. He soon sees Electra coming with some female slaves from the palace, bringing libations of wine to offer at the tomb to the spirits of the dead. He conceals himself, and by listening learn why the "libation- bearers" have come (to put "libations on Agamemnon's tomb as an order from Clytemnestra because she had an ominous dream), then appears, makes himself known to his sister, and , together with her, plots the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

Orestes and Electra are not characters in the same full sense as Clytemnestra and Agamemnon are in the first play. The one factor known about Orestes, that he was commanded by a god to kill his mother, is so absorbing in its terror that it leaves no room in the portrait of him for incidental features. He is an instrument in Apollo's ruthless hand,

a stage in man's moral pilgrimage, a battle- ground where justice joins issue with pity and humanity. The consciousness of his mission has filled his mind for a long time. He has meditated morbidly on his father's death, his own deprivation and exile, his mother's wickedness, and the penalties that will fall upon him if he neglects a son's duty. He suffers the more because he is not hardened, but what has happened to him feels to the full the claim of a mother upon her son. He courageously accepts what *fate* has laid upon him; and, in the final play, we feel that it is his heroic suffering that completes the expiation of the curse, and finally vindicates the justice of the ultimate settlement.

In the same way, Electra's personal situation is simple and complete, a depth of misery and humiliation( *her fate* ) lit by a single hope, her brother's return and vengeance. It is this situation which governs every word and act; all that is required in the way of character is a coherent resolution. and this Electra has. After the long first scene she does not appear again, nor indeed is she mentioned. There is no indication in Aeschylus of the romantic tradition that she married her cousin Pylades, who appears in this play as Orestes'companion and friend.

The Chorus, which is made up of slaves of the palace and who are intimate with Electra, play a remarkable part in the planning and accomplishment of the revenge. It is they who encourage Electra at first to avenge the violent deaths of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. As soon as they recognize Orestes they encourage him to action, and place themselves under his orders. They persuade the Nurse to tell Aegisthus to come without his armed escort. The doubt and disgust which torture Orestes do not exist for them, either before or after the deed is done. Their outlook is that of the chthonian religion,

modified by reliance on Apollo for his promised purification.

Returning to the action of the play one can notice that at this point a very long lyric section begins in which Orestes, Electra and the Chorus alternate in a series of stanzas, partly invocatory, partly reminiscent, whose purpose is to awaken the anger of Agamemnon's spirit and of the powers of the lower world, until they rise to help Orestes in his course of action . There is a general crescendo of excitement extending over twenty - two stanzas, followed by shorter antiphoral sentences which seem to drive Orestes to revenge by a recital of his humilation. The great length of this passage provokes fascinating speculation on the original method of production of this play, and to the use then made of music and choreography. When it is concluded the action again gathers place. The narrative of Clytemnestra 's dream completes the hints given in the opening Ode; and the plot is laid: Orestes and Pylades will come disguised as foreign traders and gain admittance to the palace by bringing the news of Orestes'death.

The stage proper is now left empty; and the Chorus reflects, commenting, on the fearful crimes of which women are capable when roused by reckless passion. Then a new scene is revealed, as Orestes is confronted by his mother at the palace door. He tells his tale and is hospitably welcomed ( "As our guest, call this your home") and with Pylades enters the palace.

Clytemnestra's part in this play is too short to allow any real development beyond the fully conceived character already presented in **Agamemnon**. Naturally the Nurse, who is at one with the Chorus in hating Clytemnestra, assumes that she rejoices at heart to hear of Orestes' death; but the Nurse may well be as much mistaken in this as in

her second assumption, that Clytemnestra has arranged to have her son murdered. On receiving the news of Orestes'death from the supposed "commercial traveller", the queen makes a show of grief whose wordy metaphors are as unconvincing as Macbeth's on the discovery of the dead Duncan; but even if this grief were real, its expression in the circumstances could hardly avoid sounding anything but forced. The truth is that the process of helpless corruption, which the Argive Elders traced in the story of Paris, completed its work in Clytemnestra.

Eight years of usurpation, suspicion and guilt have enfolded the once heroic outline in a cloud of obscurity; freedom has vanished in fear, and character in automatic reaction. One nobleness is allowed her at the end, that which was also given to Cassandra: the woman, unlike the man, receives her death in silence.

The final scene is remarkable, chiefly for the dramatic use which Aeschylus makes of the robe in which Clytemnestra had captured Agamemnon. This robe is mentioned in many allusions to the story, but only here explained. It seems to have been a voluminous bathgown with cords threaded through loops so that they could be pulled tight in a moment; and this "strait- jacket" Clytemnestra had designed and made herself and kept in readiness for the dayof Agamemnon's return. A returning warrior must cleanse himself from the blood of those he killed in war. For this ritual he would stand naked; his wife would attend, and throw a gown over him as he stepped from the bath to the altar where an animal would wait ready for sacrifice, having near it the sacrificial sword. Agamemnon, his arms and legs pinioned by Clytemnestra's "neat device" had no chance either to resist or to escape when she lifted the sword. The robe, pierced and blood- stained, had been

kept, through the years possibly by royal slaves to whom Clytemnestra had entrusted the perfunctory burial . Orestes now makes his attendants hold it up, and turn it round and, by displaying its "smart" ingenuity he brings the murderous act vividly before his witnesses. Then, side by, side with the bodies of Agamemnon's murderers he lays the last robe which Agamemnon wore in life, and over it pronounces a son's farewell.

The end of the scene foreshadows the third play and the expiation of the curse: "The third completing draught of blood has now been shed." Here an analogy is implied to the "three libations" ( the first to the Olypian gods, the second to the ancient heroes, the third to Zeus the Saviour ) which by convivial tradition concluded the eating of a banquet and began the drinking. Now blood has been shed in three generations: by Atreus, by Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, and lastly by Orestes. The third libation is to the Saviour. The play ends with the question: Will Zeus now save the tormented house, and bring the curse to an end?

With the third play of the trilogy, the **Eumenides**, one realizes that the whole story has been intensely concerned with human fate and human feelings. At the same time the pattern of events has been shown as the reflection of a pattern of divine will, as the working out of divinely ordained moral principles. Zeus is in heaven, judging sin and forgetting nothing; Apollo is in his temple where his unearthly voice commanded Orestes to act as the instrument of retribution. Man is now at the limit of despair and suffering; it is time for the gods to appear and speak.

The first scene takes place in front of Apollo's temple at Delphi. It is early morning, and the Priestess is about to enter. She invokes all the gods, old and new, who

have held this shrine from the earliest ages; then passes through the doorway. A moment later the solemn silence is broken by her terrified cries , and she staggers out, hardly able to tell what she has seen. Inside the temple a blood stained murderer crouches by the altar; and round him, all asleep with weariness, lie the Furies now plainly visible, in a sight to horrify piety and melt courage. Seeing this pollution of Apollo's shrine, the Priestess withdraws. The temple- façade is rolled aside, and we see what we have heard described, but there are also present two figures whom the Priestess did not see. Apollo himself stands beside Orestes, and near him is his brother Hermes, the god of journey. Apollo speaks to comfort and encourage Orestes; and sends him, with Hermes as escort, to seek final deliverance in Athens.

The Furies are left alone, still sleeping and suddenly among them appears another figure, not recognizable at first, until it reveals the pale and horrid face of Clytemnestra. Her voice is the piteous whisper of a ghost, and she tries to awaken the Furies with passionate reproaches. As they stir, she vanishes, and soon the whole pack of loathsome monsters springs into life, enraged at the escape of their prey. Now Apollo appears again to drive them from his sacred floor. In his eloquent indignation he forgets nor do the Furies remind him - that they are the same fiends with whose torments Apollo had earlier threatened Orestes if he failed to avenge his father. Apollo now tells them that Orestes is to be tried by Athena in Athens and bids them to go, too, to state their case before her.

The scene changes again, to show Orestes clinging for sanctuary to an altar in Athene's temple in Athens. The Furies arrive and find him there; and they recite an impressive Ode which is partly a spellbinding song to secure their victim. Athena herself

now enters; hears briefly the pleas of both accusers and accused; and goes to summon the wisest of her citizens to sit as a judicial court. The Furies, sure of their right, agree to a trial. While the court is being summoned, in another Ode they pronnounce an urgent warning against the dangers of impunity towards crime, and forecast the rise of a "new wickedness", unknown in former ages, when wholesome fear guided men's ways and enforced good behavior. Moreover, they insist that good behavior in itself is not enough; it must spring from the goodness of the heart. They end with a picture of the shipwreck suffered by the man who stubbornly resists the authority of justice. Then twelve Athenian Elders arrive, the court of Areopagus is solemnly constituted, and the pleading begins.

The leader of the chorus requests that Orestes give proof of the fact that he killed his mother at Apollo's command. Orestes is soon at a loss, and calls on Apollo to conduct the case for him. In order that this scene may have its full dramatic effect, it must become evident that the problem is too difficult for human solution. The repulsiveness of the Furies, their blind unreason and ferocity, disposes the audience against them; and Orestes'case, at first sight, seems strong. But Apollo now makes four speeches, in each of which, impressive though they may sound at first, he betrays the inadequacy of his position.

First, he says that his oracles are not his, but all delivered at the express command of Zeus. To begin with, he implies an appeal to authority rather than to reason, an approach which may well be unpleasing to the Athenian audience. Further, Apollo invites the members of the jury to regard the will of Zeus as weightier than the promise they have taken to judge according to their understanding; a suggestion certain to arouse mistrust.

Lastly Apollo claims the authority of Zeus for all his oracles, both personal and political.

Apollo's second speech asserts that Agamemnon's death was not to be compared with Clytemnestra's because Agamemnon was a man and a king, and his wife killed him by treachery; and his evaluation of the two deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus completely ignores the added horror attached to matricide. This produces in the audience the feeling of fear. Further, the phrase "for the most part successful hints strongly at a part which was disastrous", the sacrifice of Iphigenia, and thus reminds the audience of Agamemnon's guilt and Clytemnestra's excuse.

Lastly, Apollo puts forward a disputable theory of parenthood: "the mother is not the true parent of the child; she is a nurse who tends the growth of young seed ". This again cannot possibly make a clear appeal to any audience, for it denies outright the intimate bond between the mother and the child.

Apollo's plea ends with the promise of many gifts to make Athens great and this, the open offering of a bribe to an Athenian court, should finally dispose of any doubt that Aeschylus has intended to present Apollo's case as, at the best, unsatisfactory. The Chorus- leader answers with a single sentence bidding the judges to rever to their oath that is, to judge according to their conscience rather than in fear of the will of Zeus as interpreted by Apollo.

Athena then announces the perpetual constitution of the court of Areopagus, and bids the citizens ( as the Chorus have already bidden them ) enthrone fear as the great safeguard of law. Should the votes be equal, she says, her casting vote will be given for

Orestes. This is what happens. The case is too difficult for human decision; *matricide is a fearful crime* against which must be set both the divine command and the long period of suffering and ritual cleansing that Orestes has undergone. Athena's vote comes into effect in order to absolve Orestes who with a solemn pledge of eternal friendship between Argos and Athens, leaves the court a free man.

It remains for Athena to calm the resentment and avert the threats of the Furies. She insists that the trial has been fair; that the even voting means that the Furies are neither defeated nor disgraced, that the position offered to them in Athens assures them of perpetual honor and usefulness. Finally they relent, and pronounce blessings instead of curses. Thus violence retires and "holy Persuasion", the civilizing instrument of the new age, wins the day. The great Panathenaic procession gathers on the stage, and with the Chorus passes out through the orchestra.

### 1.2 - Sophocles' Electra

Another Greek playwright who wrote about the Electra myth is Sophocles. His play is entitled **Electra** and the theme is more concentrated on the human dilemma (matricide nd guilt ) which affects the lives of Electra and her brother, Orestes, rather than the political theme of the House of Atreus as seen in Aeschylus. Sophocles' **Electra** has the same subject as Aeschylus '**Choephorie** in the trilogy **Oresteia** - in order to revenge Agamemnon's death, his children Orestes and Electra kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

The characters of the drama are the same as those of Aeschylus but Sophocles suppresses Orestes'maid and adds Orestes' perceptor and Electra's sister, Crysotemis. The setting represents the Acropolis of Mycenae in front of the Atridas'palace, but in Sophocles'play we do not see Agamemnon's tomb.

Early in the morning, Orestes arrives together with his friend Pylades and his preceptor. Orestes asks his preceptor to go into the palace to announce his death; but the three men hide when Electra is seen, leaving the house sighing and crying. A choir of Mycenae women appear sighing, sharing Electra's *fate*. Electra tells them of the horror of the situation. Chrysotemis leaves the palace. Being shy, she does not want to be part of with Electra's battle against the oppressors. Clytemnestra appears at the palace entrance. She criticizes her daughter for taking advantage of Aegisthus ' absence in order to go and complain of the situation in public. A terrible argument takes between mother and daughter. The preceptor arrives announcing Orestes' death in a car race in Delphos *(peripety* will occur later due to the false news of Orestes'death ). Clytemnestra feels

relieved, and Electra desperate.

Clytemnestra enters the palace with the preceptor. Electra tries in vain to persuade Chrysotemis to help her kill Aegisthus and their own mother. Orestes and Pylades arrive with a funerary urn which, they say, contains Orestes'ashes. Electra takes it and cries in despair. Finally, Orestes shows himself and is recognized by Electra. Brother and sister embrace with effusion and joy. Orestes and Pylades enter the Palace. Soon the screams of Clytemnestra are heard. Later Aegisthus arrives and is also killed by Orestes in the same place where Agamemnon was murdered.

In **Electra** Sophocles deals with one stage of the great story which Aeschylus had told in the three parts of the Oresteian trilogy. The approach of the two tragedians to the same subject can here be closely compared. Except for some minor details the basic story is the same, but differences in the treatment arise from the method and artistic aims of the three writers. For Aeschylus the story is only significant in its full development from the first sin of the ancestor ( the Thyestes- Atreus "guénos") to the final release of Orestes from his load of guilt; and in presenting the saga in the form of three consecutive plays his concern is primarily with the role of power and the continuity of the divine forces which control the destinies of the doomed family - forces which cannot be questioned or resisted. The personal of the drama are less individuals than puppets, symbolic of men and women entrapped in a predicament in which humanity is condemned. Man is involved in such conflicts by the will of heaven, and only heaven can pronounce the verdict and unravel the knot.

If we compare Aeschylus' tragedy with Sophocles'work the latter is less lyric. The chorus has minor extensions and although it is still connected to action, it does not constitute ( as in Aeschylus ) one of the main characters of the drama. In general the role of the chorus role consists in expressing the feelings of the members of the town and the ones of the spectators in relation to the action that has occurred before. The Sophoclean choir does not have the richness, the majesty and the amplitude of the Aeschylean choir but it reveals grace, harmony and serenity. In Sophocles, drama is essentially action and is born from the will and personality of its characters. Immutable destiny is still admitted but within this destiny the characters act freely. In Aeschylus, destiny is a weight - a heavy burden that smashes man; in Sophocles the human will affronts the terrible "Moira" and sometimes it is able to destroy "her" ( *fate* ).

Sophoclean tragedy is directed by an artist. The prologue constitutes a real masterpiece, sometimes simple and mild, sometimes pompous and magnificent.[35] This prologue usually presents the characters and the situation in which they are going to speak with simplicity and in naturalness. After the prologue, the peripeties are developed with more complexity than those found in the tragedies of Aeschylus. They come from the "game" of human wills and sometimes they lead to an abrupt dénouement as in **Electra.**

Sophocles' characters are not gods or titans, they are men. His characters do not have the rigidity nor grandiosity of Aeschylus but they are more complex, being explored with a fine and subtle psychology. It is said that with Sophocles "tragedy descended from

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[35] Aeschylus is also considered an artist as he explores all the effects of scenery, but the **Oresteia** is especially considered a masterpiece concerning spectacle.

heavens to the earth ."[36] Sophocles used to say " I point to men how they should be".[37] He was an idealist and his characters have something of nobility, however they are true men, with faults, feeling love, hate and experiencing suffering.

Sophocles 'genius is not so grandiloquent as that of Aeschylus, but it is perhaps more perfect, because in Sophocles everything is balanced. One can say that Sophocles has reached the perfection of true art - natural and simple in nobility and in greatness. It is true that Sophocles represents the ideal in poetry ( according to Aristotle ). For this reason he has always been considered the favorite poet of the Athenians.

Sophocles pronounces no judgement. He neither approves nor condemn. In his **Electra** he tells us that in an immortal story - but a story of mortal beings - such was their predicament; such was the bearing of the persons implicated in the event. And within the limits assigned to the play, what is done is complete and final. More objective than either Aeschylus or Euripides, Sophocles imitates neither the symbolism and poetic sublimity of the elder writer nor the fierce partisanship of the younger. Yet one should not think that he ignored or dishonored the controversial implications of the legend. Rather his feeling seems to have been that it was enough to show the picture, without adding a moral lesson to it.

Sophocles was a master of dramatic technique - its inventor, to all intents and purposes. His elder master, Aeschylus, had shown what could be done with *poetry spoken*

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[36] This quotation was taken from Watt , L.M. **Attic and Elizabethan Tragedy** , New York: J.M. Dent & Co. , 1908 :45-48 and mentioned in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, article number 850 ,Chicago: Library Research Service ,1968.

[37] In fact Aristotle is the author of this sentence, in Chapter XXV of the **Poetics**.

*in character*, and had made the first step from declamatory or narrative monologue to the exhibition of dramatic conflict in dialogue between two characters. The step was an important one, yet did not constitute an essentially significant advance from the territory of epic poetry, where speech can follow speech in debate or conflict of wills.

The mere mechanical advantage of Sophocles'innovation ( the increase of the number of actors) was a considerable gain; with the triangular scene it became possible to depict a new variety of dramatic situations: a transaction between two persons being hastened, obstructed, or deflected by the intervention of a third ( Orestes, Aegisthus, Electra ), the information brought by one person evoking different reactions in each of the two others (Clytemnestra, Electra ). Aeschylus in his latest plays made occasional use of the third actor; but it must be remembered that Sophocles won his first success in the theater ten years before the production of the **Oresteia** of Aeschylus. In Sophocles' treatment of the tragic story one feels it is a different category from that of Aeschylus. The latter had to cut in order to shape the blocks he found in the old trunk of Homer; but Sophocles came upon the stage when the myth had become a flexible instrument in the poet's hand, and when it was possible to widen the scope of the drama by enlarging the Chorus and adding the third actor. So that there is, on the face of it, no reason to doubt the truth of Aristotle's assertion: Sophocles invented the three - actor scene.

At the hands of Sophocles, drama became not only triangular but three dimensional as well: to the length and breadth of mythical narrative he added the depth of human character as he observed it in his fellow mortals. What had been before a frame of more or less static figures confronting one another in profile became a perspective of living

human beings reacting to one another and shaping their own destinies by the interplay of their contrasted characters. The purpose of Aeschylus is not, like that of other dramatists, to analyze the complex machinery of the human mind, but rather to reveal the relation in which men stand to the universal order of things. In other words, the typical Aeschylean play is essentially a narrative, rather than the presentation of a thing happening, because the characters speak and act as their natures prompt them. So far as our evidence goes, Sophocles was the first to create that ever- exciting *paradox* of the theater in which, knowing perfectly well what will happen , we are yet absorbed in the contemplation of how and why it happens, and can watch it happening time and again as if it were new and unforeseen. If this is the secret of drama, its condition is that the persons of the drama should be free willed creatures, not pawns in the hands of an omnipotent force or "*fate*". Sophoclean drama is the drama of living persons choosing their own paths to happiness or disillusion, to success or failure or extinction.

Sophocles takes up in his **Electra** the tragedy of the house of Atreus, but more from a more human standpoint than that of Aeschylus. Aeschylus goes in behind the veil, (The classics critics used to say that Aeschylus was the poet of the gods, Sophocles the poet of feelings, Euripides the poet of reality.) Sophocles shows rather the working-out of a retribution by purely human means. He differs from Aeschylus in his method and outlook. Through him spoke all the culture of the Periclean age. Aeschylus burned on the altar of his own lyric fancy surcharged fountain, and Art was the slave of pure imagination. Sophocles was an artist, who drove both Imagination and Feeling to link, and made Art the dominating master of human passion. To him there are laws which have been begotten

entirely apart from and transcending both the gods and men, eternal and changeless, and so the fates that overhang some human families have their springs in moral action, manifested through pride of spirit, or dark sin rather than as inevitable and irresistible powers (Based on Jagger, **Paidéia**:197-285)

Sophocles portrays Electra in a very human way, her heart hardened by horror and revulsion till it is like a cold shining flint as she remembers continually the cruel murder of Agamemnon by her mother. She is absolutely merciless and unmoved, deviating not an instant from her resolute purpose of revenge. Thus she shows the strong emotions of a woman's nature and one can see this in Sophocles more clearly than in Aeschylus.

In Sophocles one finds that the story of the tragic line is seized at the central point; and thrown into dramatic form. The absolute fatality of the oracle is displayed. The murder is a god- demanded retribution, the evasion of which means dishonor alike to the dead hero and the whole of his race. The attempted palliations of her crime by Clytemnestra are not considered at all. The Furies whose hunting down of the miserable soul of Orestes shook Aeschylus' audience are absent. There is no moment's pause in the progress of the tragedy from the outset to the end of the horror. This tragically ironic contrast is the secret of the power of this play. Electra laments within herself, despairing but Orestes whom she can no longer hope to see, is at the very gate. Aegisthus rejoices, expecting to see the dead face of the man he hates, and has his heart broken by the vision of the dead woman he loves.

This contrast of human piteousness with the absolute hidden hate of Electra, demands the largest possible creation of sympathetic interest in order to draw the pity of

the spectators towards her terribly embittered utterance, She is stressed to a breaking point. We see only the victim of a shocking crime, impelled and possessed by a dominating ideal. The apparently hardness of this woman's heart, however, melts in the recognition scene, when Orestes appears before her, and her love for her brother rehumanizes her.

Sophocles sees the return of Orestes as the doomsday of impiety and tyranny which are based on cruel murder. It is the deepening of the awe of heaven's decree against bloody and selfish crime, and at the same time it is retribution, with restitution of the disordered balance of the universe. (Based on Jagger: 219-232)

Sophocles is more of an artist than Aeschylus in this sense, and is content to hold human interest, rather than to walk behind the veil of mystery, to seek for solutions in the mysterious shadows, where the heart fails, and the spirit shrinks for fear. In Aeschylus Orestes achieves the purpose of his life as the instrument of the outraged gods. He is the sword of divinest justice; and thus in the acknowledgment of the gods, the matter is solved. The Clytemnestra of Sophocles is not the tragic queen of Aeschylus, but rather a weak woman, dominated by a base passion, and who must pay the price for her wrongdoing (*Fatal Flaw*). Nor is she painted with such maternal touches as in Euripides's later play. Aegisthus, on the other hand, is entirely cruel, vain and despicable, all the while ignorant of the shadow that has laid its hand upon his shoulder (his *fatal flaw*).

Aeschylus shows innocence suffering for guilt; as the standards of the moral system were confused beneath the difficulty of determining issues when both sides seemed to be in the right. Sophocles however, puts rather the human action in the façade, moving according to the impulse of unseen divine laws, beyond man's explanation.

### 1.3 - Euripides' Electra

Euripides is the third of the great Greek dramatists, born in Salamina in the year 480, precisely when the victorious memorable battle raised the pride of the Greek people. The young Euripides received a good education, revealing in his works a perfect knowledge of schools and philosophical doctrines which were popular during his time.

His work is distinguished from the other two Greek tragedians especially because the scenes and the characters imagined by him are closer to reality, while the heroes of Aeschylus' and Sophocles ' heroes seem to be superior to the mortals 'capacity for acting and feeling. For this reason, as all his biographers say, Euripides' work became much more appreciated in future time, inspiring the largeststt number of imitations in modern literature.

In his woks, Euripides tried to maintain the interest of the audience for the variety of situations and for what there could be of more pathos in the dénouement of plots. One can notice the clear separation between the principal action and the choir's chants. In the Prologue it is the character, not a divinity, who informs the public of the antecedent facts, preparing for a comprehension of the episodes which follows. At the end it is one of the members of the divinity that says the last word in relation to the destiny of its protagonists (*gods "ex-machina"* )

The reading of Euripides' play **Electra** allows us to see the differences between the style of Aeschylus and of Sophocles, as well as the peculiar factors concerning which each of the great tragic dramatists understood the theme of Electra in order to present

their heroes.

The **Electra** of Euripides has the distinction of being, perhaps, the least understood of ancient tragedies. One of the reasons is that this tragedy does not have the imaginative splendor and the vastness, nor the intense poetry of former Greek works. It is a close- knit, powerful, well - constructed play, as realistic as the tragic conventions will allow, intellectual and rebellious. Its psychology can perhaps be compared to that of Ibsen.

Euripides' **Electra** is based on that particular piece of legend or history known before us. It narrates how the son and daughter of the murdered king, Agamemnon, slew, in due course of revenge and by Apollo's express command, their guilty mother and her paramour.

As has been shown, Homer had long since told the story, as he tells so many, simply and grandly, without moral questioning and without intensity. The atmosphere is heroic. It tells of a blood- feud between leaders in which Orestes, after seven years, succeeds in slaying his enemy Aegisthus, who had killed his father. He probably killed his mother also; but we are not directly told. His sister may have helped him. and he may possibly have gone mad afterwards; but these painful issues are kept determinedly in the shade in Homer's version.

Somewhat surprisingly, Euripides, although by his time Electra and Clytemnestra had become leading figures in the story and the mother - murder its essential climax, preserves a very similar atmosphere. But in Sophocles, everything dark and ominous is

avoided. Orestes enjoys the fullness of health and strength. He is tormented neither by doubts nor stings of conscience. Especially noticeable is the "austerity" with which Aegisthus is driven into the house to meet a especially ignominious death.

The combination of matricide and good spirits is undramatic. It becomes intelligible as soon as we observe that Sophocles was deliberately seeking what he regarded as an archaic or "Homeric" style and this archaism, in its turn, can be best explained as a onscious reaction against Euripides in a search for an unconventional treatment of the same subject.[38] The result is that Sophocles is not only more "classical" than Euripides, he is more primitive by far than Aeschylus.

For Aeschylus, though stepped in the glory of the world of legend, would not lightly accept its judgment upon religious and moral questions , and above all would not, in that region, play at make - believe. He would not elude the horror of this story by simply not mentioning it, like Homer, or by pretending that an evil act was a good one, like Sophocles. He faces the horror, realizes it for what it is, and tries to overcome it with a great wave of religious emotion. The matricide, even if done at a god's command, is a sin to be expiated by profound suffering . Yet since the god cannot have commanded evil, it is duty also. It is a sin that must be committed .

Euripides here once again , represents intellectually the thought of Aeschylus carried a step further . He faced the problem just as Aeschylus did and as Sophocles did not. But the solution offered by Sophocles did not satisfy him . It cannot, in its actual

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[38] This explanation is due to the fact we do not know the date of Sophocles'**Electra**, and we suppose it was written after Euripides'version.

details, satisfy any one. To him the murder of a mother like most acts of revenge , but more than most , was a sin and a horror. Therefore it should not have been committed , and the god who commanded it did commanded evil, as he had done in a hundred other cases . He is no god of light , he is only a demon of old superstitions , acting among other influences, upon a painful and tormented man, and driving him towards an unnamed duty, the horror of which, when done, will disturb his reason.

But another problem interests Euripides even more than this. He seems to ask what kind of man Orestes was and above all, what kind of woman can Electra have been to do his deed of matricide, not in sudden fury but deliberately and as an act of justice after many years. That she is a "sympathetic" heroine is out of the question; and Euripides does not deal with stage villains. He seeks real people. And few attentive readers of this play can not doubt that he has found them.

The son ,Orestes, is an exile, bred in the desperate hopes and wild schemes of exile ( his *fate* ); he is a prince without a kingdom, always dreaming of his wrongs and his restoration, and driven by the savage doctrine, which an oracle has confirmed, of the duty and strength for revenge. He is, as was shown by his later history, a man subject to overpowering impulses and to fits of will-less brooding ( *fatal flaw* ). Lastly, he is very young and is swept up by his sister's intense nature .

The sister, Electra, is the central figure of the tragedy. A woman shattered in childhood by the shock of an experience too terrible for a girl to bear ( *fate* ); a poisoned and haunted woman (Lavinia in O'Neill also),eating out her heart in ceaseless flashings of hate and love, feeling an unsatisfied hate against her mother and stepfather, and intense

love for her dead father and her brother in exile; a woman who has known luxury and state, and cares much for them; who is intolerant of poverty, and who feels her youth passing away. Her name in the Greek language means: *A lektre* - "The Unmated".

Thus Euripides'play **Electra** is completely different in tone from the other plays of his antecedents; Aeschylus and Sophocles. It was inspired by the revival of Aeschylus'**Choephoroi** . Euripides ' approach to the story is shown by his criticism of the recognition scene in the Aeschylean play. Aeschylus ' Electra recognizes Orestes by family hair and family foot (**Choephorie** 168 f.). The Euripidian Electra ( 520 ff) says: "Nonsense, a young man's hair is hardened by the palaistra and a woman's hair is soft and long; a man's foot is much bigger than a woman's". He transfers the story from heroic legend to contemporary town-life. Euripides in his **Electra** asks what nowadays would Clytemnestra and Aegisthus do with these uncomfortable children: put a price on Orestes' head and give Electra on "marriage" to someone "safe"? This involved changing the scene from Agamemnon's palace to a farmer's hut. This change carried with it a complete remodelling of the two murders.

The play starts with the moving monologue of Electra's farmer husband, who has been loyal to the family and has not touched Electra. Electra leaves the hut to fetch water for the household: a startling contrast to the Aeschylean Electra, who enters with libations sent by Clytemnestra to Aganmemnon's tomb. Euripides' Electra is doing housework to spite Aegisthus. As she and the farmer go off to their tasks, Orestes enters with Pylades, who is mute all through this play but expresses a friendship as valuable to Orestes as the farmer's is to Electra. Orestes has arrived secretly to find Electra standing

outside as she comes back with her water-pot. She sings a strophic Aeolian monody on her misery, the absence of Orestes and the murder of Agamemnon (*pity* ). The chorus of Mycenean women enter to invite her to a festival and offer her clothes, but she is only concerned with misery. The lyric dialogue continues with variation in the aeolic metre of the monody in a decorated style.

Orestes and Pylades emerge. Electra describes to the *unrecognized* Orestes her misery, the luxurious life of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, who drunkenly dances on Agamemnon's tomb. The farmer returns and invites them in. Orestes is deeply disturbed at the difference between honest poverty and corrupt wealth. His discussion of criteria points to the values which Euripides has emphasized by introducing the farmer into the story. Electra sends the farmer to ask for supplies from an old man ( who has saved Orestes and who alone, as she has said, could recognize him - *recognition*). The chorus sing a lovely decorated aeolian song about Achilles going to Troy and the arms which the Nereids brought him; the lord of such a man was slain by Clytemnestra, and she shall die for it. The world of epic glory stands in contrast to the reality in which Agamemnon's children live.

The old man arrives with the farmer ( who is mute in this scene as he goes off to his fields never to be seen again ). Then the plan is made, the killing of Aegisthus at a sacrifice and the luring of Clytemnestra by the story that Electra has given birth to a child. Another decorative aeolic ode tells of the golden lamb and the sun's change of course; the chorus comment that it does not believe this legend, but it is a useful moral story, which the murderess Clytemnestra forgot. Thus mythological fantasy here has a modern "sophistic" explanation and again ends with Clytemnestra.

A servant reports Aegisthus' death. The chorus sing for joy. Orestes and Pylades return with Aegisthus' head ( *fear* ). Electra pours out her hatred upon the murdered ruler: "you killed my father; you found you had married a tyrant; wealth is no good compared with character; you used your youth and beauty to seduce girls". This combination is in conscious contrast to Orestes'earlier description of the standards which the farmer embodies. Clytemnestra is seen in the distance. Orestes has doubts, and unlike the Aeschylean Orestes he doubts Apollo:Was the oracle a great absurdity? Could it have been an avenging spirit taking on the likeness of the god? Electra tells him not to be a coward, and sends him to wait for Clytemnestra who arrives in a carriage, attended by Trojan captives. Euripides wants the audience to see her first as a vulgar, snobbish, insecure, domineering woman, a suitable mate for Aegisthus. He therefore makes mother and daughter quarrel once more. Clytemnestra brings up the sacrifice of Iphigenia and the arrival of Cassandra ; Electra answers that she was unfaithful to Agamemnon from the day he went to Troy. Then Clytemnestra shows herself as the helpless victim of her ruthless children. She asks why Electra called; Electra asks her in to make sacrifices for her child *(peripety* ). The chorus sings excited *dochmacs* while the murder is being committed *(fear)*.

Orestes and Electra come out and sing a lyric dialogue with the chorus. Both are bitterly repentant, and this is an entirely new element in the story ( *pity* ). Electra accepts the responsibility from the beginning, the chorus say that she forced her brother against his will; and she agrees that in the actual deed she drove him on and put her hand upon his sword ( Electra's *recognition*). The Dioskouri appear to finish the play, Clytemnestra has

been justly punished but Orestes'deed was unjust: Apollo is wise but his oracle contained no wisdom for Orestes ( later in line 1302 they speak of the "unwise words of Apollo's tongue"). But Orestes will be absolved in Athens ( the Dioskouri see the Furies coming in line 1342 ) and Pylades will marry Electra and establish the farmer in Phokis.

The motive force in this human story is Electra's hatred of her beautiful but unprincipled mother and of the vicious young opportunist, Aegisthus. Most significantly, it is she who drives Orestes to murder, whereas in Aeschylus Pylades intervenes for that sole purpose with the voice of Apollo. The Choral odes provide a foil of decorative mythology and so are reinstated into the world of traditional mythology. The Dioskouri at the end also reinsert the idea that Euripides, like the Greek people, still thinks of a divinely ordained world order. But Euripides stresses also another contrast: opposed to the misuse of wealth by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, which breeds the hatred of Electra and Orestes, is the noble poverty of the farmer and the loyal friendship of Pylades.

In relation to the tragedy structure Euripides knows how to blur the contrast between what is normally reserved for actors and what is normally reserved for the chorus ("the third character"). The clearest mark of late Euripides is the increase in the number of people who affect the actions both in the family circle and beyond it, in an almost naturalistic construction.

In addition to having used traditional forms, Euripides had to use traditional stories, stories about gods and heroes, which had never been treated so realistically before. Aeschylus thus represents the traditional story that the human characters show the operation of divine law, and his plays essentially exemplify the view of Hesiod and Solon

that Zeus is just. Sophocles is more concerned in showing what kind of characters make the traditional story come true, but his religious position is not far from that of Aeschylus and he has no doubt that oracles are always proved right. It is far more difficult to define Euripides'religious position and here if anywhere, what one is tempted to say on the basis of one play will be found contradicted in another. We can only look carefully and always ask in whose mouth and in what context the words are put.

In almost all the surviving Euripidian plays ( except **Iphigenia at Aulis** ), and in at least eleven of the lost plays the story was linked, generally by the *deus ex- machina* at the end, to a holy place or a cult. This was quite unnecessary ( Sophocles only does this explicitly in **Oedipus at Colonus** ) and much more incidental than the establishment of the Erynies as Eumenides at the end of the **Oresteia**. Euripides is certainly not saying that the hero or heroine so honored is a model for men to follow. But he must have felt that the cult had some value for ordinary men or he would not have called attention to it.

Besides the immortality given by the cult there is the immortality given by poetry, and the other function of the *deus ex- machina* is to reinstate the characters in the traditional story which has preserved their feats. This again was not necessary. The stories are immortal, and by reinstating them, the *deus ex- machina* gives the characters back their immortality. For example, Sophocles could have ended his **Electra** without even mentioning the Furies and Euripides affirms repeatedly that worship is a distinctively human activity and "his" gods need or require nothing. Apollo or the Dioskouri at the end of Euripides' **Electra** do not restore moral or cosmic order, they merely reassert the traditional story.

Even in the cases where it is fairly certain that the modern view is held by Euripides himself ( Orestes'doubts about murdering his mother for example ), he also draws a traditional deity. This allows Euripides to express his own belief to utter, but this is not a message or moral lesson. In so far as Euripides has a message, it is in the play in its totality with all its metrical and musical varieties and gradations, all its range from beautiful fantasy to modern reality, all its differences of interpretations and behavior, all its differences between characters and within a single character in which, nevertheless, certain human events and emotions are always condemned or praised .

Euripides' **Electra** nicely illustrates the justifiable use of the *deus ex- machina*. Euripides, like Aeschylus, wishes to interpret the slaughter of Clytemnestra by her son as a dreadful deed which is followed by dreadful consequences. But, since Euripides is writing a single play rather than a trilogy, it is technically impossible to present a dramatic solution of the state of turmoil in which the characters find themselves near the end of the play. Therefore the *deus ex -machina* is introduced to relate the eventual solution, which somewhat resembles that of the **Eumenides** of Aeschylus. An admirable dignity and finality is given to the close of the play.

These three Greek playwrights and their different approaches to the myth of Electra open the way for O'Neill's modern version of this same myth in his trilogy **Mourning Becomes Electra** . But before we analyze it, let us take a look at modern drama so as to situate O'Neill.

## 2 - Eugene O'Neill and Modern Drama

Drama has become a major modern art form since Ibsen inaugurated the so called Modern Drama at the end of the 19th century. It is impossible to understand modern dramaturgy without a critical understanding of dramatic naturalism, dramatic expressionism and certain related movements.

Drama, like all forms of art oscillates between imitation or reproduction of reality and its variation by imagination into a symbolic object. Drama is fundamentally "an imitation of action" ( Aristotle's definition of tragedy in his **Poetics** ) in order to convey to an audience or to a reader the emotions and thoughts of people involved in conflict or in interaction one with the other whether the causes are more or less supernatural ( Greek drama ) or purely human ( mostly modern drama ). The more the causes and conflicts tend towards the supernatural or towards the archetypal (Jung ), the more the dramatic action takes on the appearance of a ritual.

Drama is inevitably grounded in human reality and actions which are by definition impure. Sometimes there are moments of pure lyricism on the part of the chorus and pure poetry of language in Greek drama, but drama is meant to be enacted and not only recited and, as such, it requires an audience which must be given the possibility of apprehending the meaning and import of actions through actions. Most people need to see a play acted in order to get its message. All playwrights are aware of the need of an audience and of the fact that a play is only complete once it has been fused into dramatic experience by the interaction of actors and audience.

Drama should be dramatic action, and construction with an organic system. It should be something organic with a beginning, an interplay of human emotions and actions and an ending which is a form of resolution of the conflict of interplay of human relationships (All these concepts are found in Aristotle's **Poetics**).

One of the forms of expression in Modern Drama is the Naturalistic Drama. It can not be labelled realism since realism philosophically is its antithesis. According to Chiari, who is in a way against orthodox Naturalism ( **Landmarks of Contemporary Drama** ) - realism, philosophical realism, implies the existence of a transphenomenal informing substance of supernatural or noumenal origin. It is the idea of Plato, the essence of Aristotle, the subsistent form of Christian thought or the "noumenon" of Kant. Therefore he who believes in realism will repudiate all attempts at confining its appearance and, if he is an artist, he will seek to discover through his art this informing reality through imagination and through a synthesis of appearances and not through photographic reproductions of appearances.

Naturalism denies the existence of any active informing substance and reduces the world to material elements. It is not difficult to see that the attempt to reproduce exactly a given aspect of reality is merely a distortion and a falsification of the true reality, which can only be apprehended through imagination extracting the essential elements of any given object or experience and embodying them into an imaginative entity or symbol which is *Art.*

The aim of art is a totality of experience and its component elements must be unified, becoming an integral part of the whole. In drama all the elements must be

congruent to the action or if there is no action, to the central situation which is at the heart of the dramatic interest.

There are critics who view Naturalism in a negative way. John Gassner, for example, in **Form and Idea in Modern Theater**, says that Naturalism can be sometimes interchangeable with Realism and it can be defined broadly and narrowly. It signifies not only a strict, often extreme mode of realism but rather a narrow dogma introduced into dramatic theory by Émile Zola in 1873 ( 19th century ), consonant with its idolatry of mechanistic sciences as the key to all truth. This strictly naturalistic view is mechanistic, psychological and deterministic.

According to Zola, man is primarily an animal whose emotions can be submitted to scientific laboratory tests. The individual may be exhibited as the product, puppet and victim of the inexorable forces of heredity, instinct and environment, for man may be regarded as a wholly natural object, subject to natural processes. Naturalists also subordinated morality to the order of nature.

The strict applications of these standards of Naturalism to playwriting resulted in the presentation of environments and more or less animal or instinctive behavior on the stage. Pictures of degradation, disease and sexual license abounded in advanced theatrical circles after 1880. Naturalism became a special case and its progress was punctuated by conflicts with censorship.

Naturalists required of the actor the utmost authenticity in speech, appearance and movement, even encouraging him to turn his back to the audience when the action called for it, thus giving the proscenium arch the character of a fourth wall. They also called for the utmost naturalness in playwriting, discouraging plot.

Zola and Nietzsche are responsible for the spread of Naturalism. Zola would say "the word art displeases me, it contains I do not know what ideas of necessary arrangements, to make art it is not to mistake something which is outside man and outside nature ?". Zola's "scientific" program for Naturalism demanded absolute objectivity and clinical detachment. Nietzsche maintains his position in an opposition of the artists to a consistent Naturalism. In his work **Twilight of Idols**, he deplored the results of nonselectors as a "mass of souls" and at best a piece of "mosaic" and protested that Nature is no model.

Naturalism, however, did not cause any great changes in dramatic form that were not implicit in realism as practiced by courageous playwrights. In demanding that drama consist of "slice of life" scenes, Zola and his followers also discouraged plottiness and theatrical contrivances, but so did realists such as Ibsen and Shaw. Both opposed the drama of intrigue, but without embracing a Naturalist program of the preference, for Naturalness erected and somewhat distorted into an article of naturalistic faith by Zolaism. The kindest thing to be said, is that it was, on the negative side, a renunciation of easy and banal means of winning public interest, and on the positive side, that it expressed one of the oldest ideas of art - Art concealing Art ( qtd in Williams: 335).

Unfortunately the doctrinaire Naturalists soon alienated the public with the grossness of their plays and the pretension of their stage productions until their deterministic views and fascination with raw animalism. However they received much support from the social conflicts and wars of the 20th century cruelty. And it may also be argued that by minimizing the role of reason in human life, naturalism prepared the ground for the excesses of expressionists and surrealists.

In a summary of modern drama, Raymond Williams, in his book **Drama from Ibsen to Brecht**, says that all the theatrical movements - naturalism, expressionism, epic theatre, the absurd, etc, - acquired external associations. Each of the movements is intrinsically a recommendation; an offered completion of the creative effort, a way of training an audience ( in Williams: 331-347).

It is said that we have gone "beyond Naturalism". But Naturalism means several different things. In its widest sense it is an absorbed interest in the contemporary everyday world, and a corresponding rejection or exclusion of any supposed external design or system of values. It is then an absorbed recreation of the ways in which people, within human limits, actually speak, feel, think, behave etc. By these criteria, many of the supposed rejections of Naturalism are in fact variations on it. Naturalism, even in its various forms, has the same central purpose: a true representation of life. Strindberg advocates that true Naturalism is " where the great conflicts occur" and his definition can be applied as it stands to Ibsen's major naturalist plays. Ibsen affirms that his plays are related only to humans: " My play is no tragedy in the ancient acceptation. My desire was to depict human beings and therefore I would not make them speak the language of the gods" (Qtd in Williams :333).

Naturalist plays do not have merely the technical impulse of saying the things exactly as scientists / neurologists do: it is in part like that but not only that. The driving force of great naturalist drama was not the reproduction of rooms or dress or conversation on the stage. It was *a passion for truth* in strictly human and contemporary terms.

One can observe another positive meaning of Naturalism ( according to Williams). There is always a precise internal relation between a structure of feeling and its effective conventions in the great Naturalist drama, between the strictly human definition of truth and the direct representation of human actuality. In the new Naturalist drama there was the establishment of new external conventions; methods and practices without a precise relation to the consciousness they had been designed to express. Representation, verisimilitude, probability became in these terms self- sufficient. A Naturalist scene is then abandoned but Naturalist speech is retained or vice versa, going " beyond Naturalism". It is then important to distinguish Naturalist drama from what we call the Naturalist habit. It is not in the separated conventions that Naturalism defines itself; it is in the structure of feelings to which , as serious conventions, they relate.

## 3 - O'Neill 's play Mourning Becomes Electra

In the theatrical context of Modern Drama, O'Neill can be included among the Naturalists as he most of the times portrays characters who are true to life with great veracity and who follow their natural instincts. He also mentions the Greek *fate* as something of natural determinism which man can not escape. This is seen in several of his plays, especially in **Desire Under the Elms** and in **Mourning Becomes Electra**. In the play in study, **Mourning Becomes Electra,** we can see that he clearly revises and revives the myth of Electra explored before by the three Greek playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. O'Neill is also part of the tendency of modern playwrights to work with experimental drama especially in his use of myth .

The myth of Electra, so well represented in the classical Greek tragedy, is revived in O'Neill in a modern version with classical characteristics. Myth has become a form of contemporary expression and the Greek myths have been used not only in drama but in psychological theory as can be seen in Freud and Jung, with their patterns of the Oedipus and the Electra myths. O'Neill in **Mourning Becomes Electra** uses not only the Greek notions of myth but the Freudian and the Jungian applications of both the Oedipus and the Electra complexes.

But before entering into the analysis of the Electra myth as it is seen by O'Neill, one should remember that the Electra myth is treated differently even by the Greek tragedians for it is clear that in the Greek plays what we call "the myth" is subject to real variation. If we compare the **Oresteia** of Aeschylus, the **Electra** of Sophocles and the

**Electra** of Euripides we find radical differences not only in details but of experience.[39]

Within the context of classical versus modern tragedy, Eugene O'Neill is among those who purposely adapt the classical mode to modern plays. Like the ancient Greeks, O'Neill also blames antagonistic/ cosmic forces of the universe for the tragic action which occurs in his plays. The playwright revives the Greek versions of the myths of Electra and

Phaedra / Hippolytus. However, unlike the Greek myths, O'Neill 's view of tragic drama also contains a psychoanalytic Freudian focus, especially present in those plays which treat of the Oedipus and Electra complexes.

Eugene O'Neill has greatly contributed to the development of American Drama by introducing modern drama in America and by reviving Greek Tragedy. His play **Mourning Becomes Electra** is one in which he attempts to reinterpret the old story of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Electra and Orestes in terms of modern psychology and this attempt results in a New England tragedy, not totally Greek, but remarkably effective and moving, in which the main incidents of the classic plot have been preserved.

O'Neill is a "modern" tragic dramatist concerned with man's tragic *fate* and tormented by the truest sense of the tragic which the modern world has known. His plays show the courage of man and a fierce willingness to struggle with the imponderable . O'Neill stated his awareness of high tragedy, as the Greeks and Elizabethans had written it, and his attitude toward life and his own works are in the following words:

> Sure, I'll write about happiness, if I can happen to meet up thatluxury and find it sufficiently dramatic and in harmony with any deep rhythm in life. But happiness is a word, what does it mean? Exaltation: an intensified feeling of the significant worth of a man's being and becoming? Well, it

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[39] See the section on the Greek Tragedians: Aeschylus , Sophocles and Euripides.

> means that and not a mere smirking contentment with one's lot, I know there is more of it in one real tragedy than in all the happy ending plays ever written. It is mere present day judgement to think of tragedy as unhappy: The Greeks and Elizabethans knew better. They felt the tremendous lift to it. It roused them spiritually to a deeper understanding of life... They saw their lives ennobled by it, a work of art is always happy, all else is unhappy. I don't love life because it's pretty. Prettiness is only clothes. I am a truer lover than that. I love it naked. There is beauty to me even in its ugliness. (Qtd in Brown: 24 )

Eugene O'Neill was greatly influenced by Greek and Elizabethan tragedy which ennobled life to exaltation, believing in the old but incontestable happiness created by true tragedy. Assuredly tragedy is one of the strongest as well as the noblest of man's grasping for expression. Its subject is anguish and anguish is the source of the pleasure it gives. True tragedy, regardless of its subject matters, includes those who are adult enough to realize that all men, however happy are doomed to die. But tragedy is not concerned with the span of the year. It is concerned only with the intensity of the moments. It is concerned with dying, and in death its heroes achieve a certain tranquillity, a certain sublime and transfiguring sensation, not merely from, but because of the agonies they have endured. This real fact of life and death is exalted in classic as well as in Eugene O'Neill's modern works.

In O'Neill's plays (tragedies ), man is always responsible for bringing grief or suffering upon himself, unlike the presence of the cosmic fate of Greek tragedies. O'Neill's tragic hero is a "common man", the "hero" who suffers because of his failure to realize his ideal, to fulfil his dream of living a life in the way he wished. O'Neill shows through his tragic characters that the gulf between what man is and what he wants to be can never be bridged.

In **Mourning Becomes Electra** Eugene O'Neill chose not only to retell a Greek story in terms of the civil war in New England but to house his Mannons in a great, chaste, Greek revival home, columned as if it were a temple. He demonstrated in this play that his best plays seek "Greek revival" in their spiritual archictecture. Tragedy, in the classical sense, was always a kind of religion for O'Neill in its own right .

**Mourning Becomes Electra**, a retelling of Aeschylus' **Oresteia**, repeats the Atredians' myth of the family curse. Like the **Oresteia** , it is also a trilogy and it has the same glory of the Greek Tragedy. It is a story of revenge , a saga of the way in which *Fate* calls upon Electra and her brother Orestes, to revenge the murder of their father, Agamemnon, by slaying their wicked mother, Clytemnestra and her no less wicked lover, Aegisthus. Eugene O'Neill, needless to say, took even greater liberties with this classic myth than any of his predecessors dared to do . Thus he made the story very much his own, without robbing its terrible sequence of events of either their force or essential outline.

O'Neill has chosen to tell the story in full, to prepare for its coming, to catch it at the height of its action and to follow as the avengers commit the awful deeds that *fate* has demanded of them since the time when the Erinyes (or Furies ) pursued Orin/ Orestes. The modern playwright uses the classic mode not totally according to Aeschylus but more according to Sophocles and to Euripides in relation to the character of Electra. O'Neill "dedicates" his trilogy to the character of Electra, as is obvious in his choice of the title. It is she who dominates and fuses the action, as the main protagonist of **Mourning Becomes**

**Electra.***

O'Neill's "trilogy" **M.B.E.** may be compared to the classical dramas mentioned herein in the sections on Greek tragedy and on Aristotle's tragedy. The comparison can be made especially in relation to plot, structure and theme. In O'Neill's play one finds a similar story with the same myth of Electra. All the characters are to be found with different names but each one is somehow related to their classical prototypes found in Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. O'Neill freely uses the three ancient tragedians by adapting and "subverting" the myth of Electra according to his own intentions.

In relation to this trilogy O'Neill said that he was trying "to get the modern psychological approximation of the Greek sense of fate into such a play." And he gives this sense especially in the character of Lavinia, who has all the characteristics of the Freudian- Jungian Electra complexes. O'Neill derives his formal action more from Freud than from Aeschylus. Lavinia, The "Electra- figure", is jealous of her mother because she also is in love with Adam Brant. The relationship of Orin and Christine is that of Freud's Oedipus.

In **Mourning Becomes Electra**, the Agamemnon of the classical versions is Ezra Mannon, a hard, unbending New Englander, who is off to the Mexican War ( his Trojan War ). His wife Christine ( Clytemnestra ) is a foreigner who hates her husband. Their two children Lavinia ( Electra ) and Orin ( Orestes ) nurture an incestuous love for their parents . Lavinia is in love with her father, while Orin loves his mother (examples of what is known today as the complexes of Electra and Oedipus, respectively). While

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* From now on we will refer to it as **M.B.E**

Ezra Mannon is at war, the wife has an affair with captain Adam Brant (Aegisthus), the illegitimate son of a wayward Mannon. Lavinia, besides her deep love for her father, is also in love with Captain Brant, her mother's lover. She follows her mother to New York and learns of her infidelity to her father. She then confronts her mother , making her break off the affair with Captain Brant, in order to welcome home Ezra Mannon and Orin. Meanwhile, Christine talks with Captain Brant of the necessity of killing Mannon so that they can be happy together. Lavinia sees the evidence of her mother's killing of her father and resolves to take revenge on Christine with her own hands. She asks for the help of her brother Orin in killing their mother 's lover and Christine takes her own life. Later in the third section of the play *The Haunted*, the ghosts of the dead Mannons (Ezra, Christine, Captain Brant), who refuse to die, haunt Orin and Lavinia, making Orin kill himself and making Lavinia "bury herself alive", by locking herself inside the family home (The Mannons 'sepulchre) for the rest of her life, in order to atone for the sins of the family .

The story has an awesome fascination in terms of tragedy. It also comes through as a restatement of the tragic melodrama of heroic proportions. (O'Neill's plays are sometimes considered melodramas by the critics because his tragedies take place on the personal level rather than on the universal / cosmic levels). However, O'Neill's tragedies may be considered tragedies in the classical sense of the word because, from his personal tragedies, in the classical sense, one can deduce universal characteristics applicable to real life. It is true that the poetic beauty of the Greeks is not present in O'Neill's prose and modernization, but the tragic dilemma remains and also much of the agony and exaltation that are part of its dignity and majesty.

Comparing the structure of **Mourning Becomes Electra** to the versions of Aeschylus and Euripides, one can say that the story itself follows the Greeks up to the middle of the third section of the play, in which the incest motif is introduced. The death of Orin and the transference of the whole situation and dramatic conclusion from the brother to the sister depart from all the three Greek playwrights (Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides). Adam Brant's relation to the family adds to the role of lover the motif of a blood relationship as Aesgisthus was also kin to Agamemnon. The old hired man (Seth) parallels to some extent a Greek device (the old- servant Greek device, workman townspeople, a kind of "chorus" representing the collective voice of the city). Other Greek devices include O'Neill 's descriptions of external gestures and inclinations contained in the play, for example: Mannon's "face", which resembles a "life-like mask" rather than a "living flesh" is a suggestion of the masked actor; the "Greek" façade on the New England house is an indication of an architectural style; the chorus of townspeople is a formal reminiscence. The play is also written in the form of a trilogy used by the Greek dramatist. The final curtain of the first part falls on Mannon's death, as in Aeschylus on the death of Agamemnon, but there is not the same effect of totality because of the stress put on Lavinia (Electra). The play is mainly about how "*mourning becomes Electra*". In Aeschylus' **Agamemnon** Electra does not even appear. The magnificent theme that there is something in the dead (The Mannons' *curse/fate*) that the living cannot placate appears both in the Greek plays and in O'Neill's play. The end of **Mourning Becomes Electra** is built on the imaginative insight given by the Greeks. Lavinia goes into the house, the blinds are closed, the door shut forever , and the stage left in silence. The exaltation is there, the completion, the tragic certainty. Finally the peculiar kind of suspense employed

in the play is Greek. Classic suspense does not depend on mere crude strain, on the wondering of how things will turn out, however entertaining that effect may often do so. Classic suspense has a biological defense: one knows that in life will end in death, but just how the course of all living will shape and fulfill itself one does not know. Each human being is brought up by an animal will to survive, by a passionate participation in and an absorbed contemplation of the course to be run, until the last moment completes itself, and human development faces what procession exactly of logic and ecstasy of fate will appear, what beautiful or dark threads will come into the human fabric of destiny. Suspense proves thus to be not necessarily a scheme, effective as that may be but rather an inner quality. O'Neill maintains this Greek suspense in **Mourning Becomes Electra**, making the play a masterpiece of "classic" tragedy in a modern version.

A very interesting modern characteristic of **Mourning Becomes Electra**, which is different from the classic versions of the myth of Electra, is O'Neill's treatment of his Electra (Lavinia). He gives the play to Lavinia, it is she who controls the action of the play (and of the characters) from the beginning to its end. In the Aeschylean trilogy this does not happen. Electra is only a secondary character, who appears only in the second part of the trilogy, the **Choephorie**. The central hero is the royal line represented by Agamemnon and Orestes. In Sophocles' **Electra** there survives what must be only a section of the trilogy, (from Aeschylus' the **Choephorie)**. His protagonist Electra, though much of the torment and waiting has been hers, is left at the end betrothed to Orestes'faithful friend - Pylades - and the premonition and remorse are left to Orestes, who has been responsible for his mother's death. Yet in the Sophoclean play, Electra is not a mere spectator. She leads her brother to kill their mother consciously. She acts all the time even though during

the moment of the crime . Orestes seems to be thus guided by the sister, who reports the scenes of the crime to the audience . This is a very impressing picture of the pathós of pleasure generated in a tragic environment . In Euripides' **Electra** , the conclusion are the presentiments of Orestes (*fate*) and the marriage of Electra to Pylades . In Aeschylus' **Orestes**, Electra cleaves to her brother , who suffers from a violent neurotic sickness, easily explained in modern times . Electra in Euripides is always in action being almost a pantomine in her hyperactivity. They are both in danger because of their action , and the whole situation is solved with a trivial and silly dénouement - gods from the machine ("deus ex -machina"), killings and abductions , wholly undramatic and unredeemed, in so far as this dénouement is redeemed only by Euripides'dialectic and poetic glamour.

But O'Neill assumes a "feministic" position similar to that of Sophocles by centralizing all the action of the play in his Electra. She has endured everything and she will bear the Mannons' curse with courage and resignation for the rest of her life. O'Neill freely "subverts" the Electra myth by simultaneously making use of elements from all of the Greek playwrights. By giving emphasis to the character of Electra and by dedicating the play to her, he is closer to the mythic versions of Sophocles and Euripides, but paradoxically he closes the play by adopting the Aeschylean version of Electra. The condition of O'Neill's Electra (Lavinia) at the end of the play, when she closes the Mannons' temple and buries herself alive within it, is similar to a *Choephorie* mourning and guarding the paternal / hero tomb.

The incestuous relationship around which centers much of the action of the play may make the play appear as essentially Freudian, but this is not necessarily true. It is certain that O'Neill hoped to get a "modern psychological approximation of the Greek

sense of *fate*", but he also said that **Mourning Becomes Electra** would have been "almost exactly as it is if I had never heard of Freud or Jung or the others" (qtd in Barret Clark: 136). According to Clark, O'Neill succeeded in putting the Greek story into the level of rationalistic psychology, especially in his representation of a world in which, as in most Greek tragedy, there is no future and no hope. But these two arguments do not explain O'Neill's artistic intentions when using this myth as the exploration of the predominance of the irrational in human behavior. O'Neill's intentional use of the myth and memory of the ancient theater in modern theater is a resource that makes acting less banal and destroys the possibility of a completely rational world. Things can not always be explained on the rational level. They are sometimes out of control and can only be explained, expressed and understood through the medium of art, and in O'Neill's case, through acting on stage - through the artist's creation.

Raymond Williams (222-223) when analyzing **Mourning Becomes Electra** as a myth revival play, concludes that O'Neill's use of myth is, in a way, confused. He thinks that O'Neill is being more Freudian than a tragedian. According to Williams, the conventional association between the names of the myth and the Freudian theory of motive is then used, rhetorically, to unite these conceptions. The questions which the action raises, are not resolved by but referred to, this external association. The real drive of the play is behind this façade. The structure of feeling that is actually operative is of a different kind again: not so much that the relationships are destructive as that they are illusory.

O'Neill's play, **Mourning Becomes Electra** examines tragedy and the possibilities of tragedy in modern time by using the framework of Greek plays for a very modern theme. This is possible in O'Neill, especially due to his use of the Freudian/

Jungian approaches to the myths of Oedipus and of Electra, since although the action is set in the American Civil war, the motives of the action are thoroughly Freudian.

There is indeed a great difference between the Mannons and the Atridas and the curse of fate in O'Neill is replaced by all the possible permutations of incestuous love . In the **Oresteia** the crimes of Clytemnestra and Orestes are part of a religious world which, with its strict rules and rituals, practically guided the hands which committed them. Therefore these characters are truly the victims of forces, or of a form of transcendence which overwhelms them. In that respect they reach a tragic grandeur which can only be attained in similar conditions, that is to say in the Greek world where man pitted his will and his courage against fate and gods which he knew were bound to overwhelm him. Such is not the case with O'Neill.

In O'Neill's world, religion has been replaced by psychology. O'Neill is certainly religious and as much obsessed by guilt and sin ( the Puritanism in the Mannons) as any of the Greek tragedians but the Christian god cannot be made to intervene to release violence, murder and revenge on creation, as could the inhabitants of the Greek Olympus. Thus O'Neill has to replace ancestral fury and religious revenge by Freudian psychology. The temperature at which the dramatic fusion begins to take place is therefore, definitely lower, and it can never be raised to the same heights through the means which O'Neill uses.

The characters in O'Neill's trilogy , especially Orin ( Orestes) and Lavinia (Electra) are not the descendants of the Atrides; they are only the children of an American general. Yet the single-mindedness, the violence, with which they tear each other to pieces is both terrifying and piteous. One should ask why they do that... Because *cruel Nature*

has put them into incestuous hateful forces which can only explode and destroy those who harbour them. It is neither royal nor ritualistic but it is terribly human, and as the human is the very basis of regality and ritualism, they therefore go a long way towards the requirements of tragedy.

In O'Neill's **Mourning Becomes Electra**, what comes through as the decisive feeling is the damage people do to each other: a rather different version of the "unconscious" ( Freud ), though one which has become conventional. It is a structure of feeling on which modern drama rests, but it is a weakness in **Mourning Becomes Electra** (according to Williams ) that it not only rationalizes the feeling, by the external references, but that it is deeply confused, in its own essence, by these very gestures, pointing in several directions at once. The "myth" in O'Neill, that is to say, confuses rather than clarifies ( in Williams's opinion). This point is seen more clearly in the last line of **Mourning Becomes Electra** after (Lavinia ) Electra shuts herself alive into her family's tomb:

"It takes the **Man**nons to punish themselves for being born"

The name **Man**non of course refers not only to Agamemnon, but to this particular destructive family . In a suggestion through the name to **Man** - in universal terms - it also refers to all men in the universe and to man's original sin. This also proves that O'Neill has written a modern but classical tragedy when he generalizes. He "universalizes" man and his personal tragedies, as in the case of all the members of the **Man**nons'family.

In relation to the approaches to myth seen in this dissertation one can observe

that, in O'Neill's trilogy **Mourning Becomes Electra**, the approaches are present even if indirectly. By using Greek patterns and myths in a modern way, O'Neill 's "revival" of the Electra myth follows Lévi- Strauss' views of myth, when he posites his opinion that the transmission of myth can never be complete throughout time, that myth has a tendency to duplicate, triplicate and so on. This function of repetition of the same sequence is to render the structure of the myth, and in a way O'Neill has contributed to the transmission of the uncompleteness of myth ( see the section on Lévi- Strauss in this dissertation: 74-83). O'Neill is considered Freudian by various critics ( Gordenstein for example ), especially of the portrayal in his characters. His Electra ( Lavinia ) is an anguished woman tortured by her great love and dedication to her father and engaged in an eternal search for the revenge of her beloved father's murder. Jung is present in the classical as well as in O'Neill's plays with his Electra complex and his notions on myths and archetypes which are present in the curse (the *Guénos*) of the representative families (either in the Tyeste-Atreus clan of the Greek tragedies or in the Mannon family in O'Neill's tragedy).

Barthes, in his article on Greek tragedy (**The Obvious and the Obtuse**), questions the absolute truth and the total answers provided by the ancient myths of the theater of the fifth century (Barthes: 65). In terms of struture, Barthes views the Greek tragedy as having a very organized structure with synthesis and coherence of different dramatic codes (Barthes: 62). Barthes also thinks that one gets from the Greek theater more than a structural truth - a complete signification from the Greek age and thought. O'Neill's plays are well structured and possess different dramatic codes coherent with each other.

O'Neill illustrates Nietzsche's thought in his tragedies since Nietzsche considers

tragedies and the hero 's salvation respectively, either the refusal or the acceptance of the order (Apollo) or disorder (Dionysus) of the world around and within him. Nietzsche also based his theory of tragedy on the Greek myths and gods (in **The Birth of Tragedy**)

O'Neill seems to adopt the Freudian / Jungian approach as he superimposes in his trilogy the Oedipal/ Electra attraction not present in the Greek plays and Gordenstein (:136- 145) says that O'Neill (as well as a tradition of other American writers like Melville, Faulkner, Nathanael West) follows a Greek pattern as interpreted by Freud.

So the myth scholars seen so far share in a way common views and approaches to myth and these can be applied to O'Neill's use of them in his trilogy. O'Neill's "haunted" characters Orin and Lavinia tried to escape their past and their guilt in the paradisiacal "blessed isles". Freud and Jung speak about the repressed instincts and of the unconscious feelings resultant from the repressed "free" feelings, especially the form adopted to escape from the repression and castration: The Oedipus / Electra Complexes. Marcuse and Nietzsche agree as to man's necessity to find a union (in spite of "civilization" which "destroys" man) between Eros (in Christine) and Thanatos (in Lavinia) , between Apollo (Mannon) and Dionysus (in Christine, in Adam and in the islands) in order to "accept" repression and Puritanism (in the Mannon family) without feeling himself a prisoner, but a liberated and free being. This was impossible for the "haunted" Mannon members. Marcuse and Nietzsche speak of the "eternal return", a finding of eternity, a renewal of primordial happening in man's constant present- day existence. The characters of O'Neill's trilogy **Mourning Becomes Electra** tried in vain to search this eternal return. All of the scholars 'views of myth are relevant to the myth studied in this dissertation, especially the Freudian/ Jungian myth of Electra.

In relation to the tragic devices , **Mourning Becomes Electra** has all the characteristics of tragedy found in Aristotle's **Poetics**. Besides being a play that treats the myth of Electra in almost the same way as the ancient / Greek plays, Aeschylus'**Oresteia**, Sophocles' **Electra** and Euripides' **Electra** - one also finds in this play Aristotle's terms that, according to him, help to define tragedy in classical terms.

In O'Neill the Greek *fate,* which results from cosmic antagonistic forces independent of man's will, is found both within man (his personal *flaws*) and outside of him (as when external circumstances contribute to his *fate and fall*). In **Mourning Becomes Electra** , *fate* is present in the "curse "of the Mannons who are cold creatures, unable to experience life fully; and each time they try to experience real passion, they are destroyed. This happens to each ill- fated character. One can see the comment on this "inherited curse" in the critic David Daiches'article "**Mourning Becomes O'Neill**" (Encounter: 74) when he says that O'Neill's biographer, Croswell Brown, tells us that this "curse" found in O'Neill's main characters is strongly inserted in O'Neill's own personality and he has gotten it from his inheritance of being a "Black Irishman" - which means suffering from a hereditary curse that involved the inability to communicate love. In this play each character carries this *fate* (*guénos*): Ezra Mannon in his desire for a reconciliation with Christine after returning from the war (**Selected Plays of Eugene O'Neill**: 409); Christine ( a "Mannon" by legal bonds ) in her passionate and irrational love for Captain Brant ( **M.B.E**: 392 ); Lavinia in her incestous love for her father and later for her brother; Orin, ( later looking like his father - **M.B.E**: 500) in his love for his mother and later for Lavinia as the figure of the mother (**M.B.E**: 508). But all of these characters are in a way unable to communicate adequately the love they feel and they

become frustrated and desperate.

The Aristotelian *"fatal flaw"* is also found in this play which is somehow related to *fate* already explained in the previous paragraph. For example, Ezra Mannon is like the Agamemnon of the Greek plays, as he carries the Mannons'curse ( *fate* ). He is the heir of a Puritanical family and with the "puritan conviction of man born to sin and punishment - just like the *Greek* approach to tragedy - plot of crime and retribution, chain of *fate* "(O'Neill's own words quoted in Barret Clark: 530 ) And because in Puritanism sin is punished with death, Ezra Mannon is very much worried about death:

> **Mannon:** That's always been the Mannons'way of thinking.They went the white- meeting house on Sabbaths and meditated on death. Life was a dying. Being born was starting to die. Death was being born. That white meeting - house - a temple of death. (**M.B.E**.: 409)

The Mannons had always been puritanical creatures, unable to experience life fully without guilt. Their curse *(hamartia)* is the denial of life, their stern puritanical morality , "racial / religious" prejudice and the impossibility of living a normal and spontaneous life.

When O'Neill mentions in the introduction to this play that it is a play about psychological *fate*, he is placing this fate in the Puritanical conscience (Doris Alexander: 923-934). One can go back to the play **M.B. E.** and see the inherited "guénos" that has begun with Mannon's father. This is a very strong example of the destructive effects of Puritanism . O'Neill's house of Atreus is a Puritan house with a Puritan heritage; much of of the family doom proceeds directly from this fact. The original curse on the family begins with the love of the two Puritan brothers (just like Thyestes and Atreus) for the Canuck

nurse girl, Marie Brântome. The destructive effects of this love are generated largely from the family Puritanism. The Puritan "Atreus", Abe Mannon, disguises his jealousy in a moral condemnation and expels his brother from the family. Although David is loved by Marie, he cannot live happily with her, and because of his Puritan sense of shame, becomes an alcoholic and finally kills himself. In the next generation, Abe Mannon's Puritan son Ezra Mannon ignores Marie Brântome's dying plea for help, despite his childhood love for her, because he assumes that her sinfulness excludes her from charity. So Ezra Mannon tries to escape this curse and once in his life he wanted to forget death and to experience true love without considering it sinful . For once in his life he wanted to think about life and living: "Death (in the war) made me think of life. Before that life had only made me think of death" (**M. B. E.**: 409). He finally confesses to his wife the realization that he had always loved her but could neither express it nor confess it afraid of committing sin:

> **Mannon:** All right then, I came to surrender to you - that inside me. I love you. I loved you then and all the years between and I love you now. ( **M. B. E.** : 410 )

But this sudden revelation of love is too late for both Mannon and for Christine. In the past all she wanted was this demonstration of love and affection from her husband, but she had been for him just "another dead body" all these years of unhappy marriage. Now that she has a lover, she has finally experienced love and passion without guilt, and because of that she planned to eliminate her deathlike husband as she wished to live intensely all that life and love could offer her and that she had found ( or at least thought she did ) in the arms of Adam Brant. She is consciously prepares her husband's death:

**Christine :** He's taking medicine for heart trouble. I'll give him his medicine. Oh, I've planned carefully .( **M. B. E.** : 398)

She tells her husband she can not love him anymore because she now loves Adam Brant. Her empty heart has finally been filled with a true love. She confesses to her husband her daring and courageous decision to maintain the love- relationship:

**Christine :** Yes, I dared ! and all my trips to New York weren't to visit father but to be with Adam! He's gentle and tender, he's everything you've never been. He's what I've longed for all these years with you - a lover ! I love him ! So now you know the truth (**M. B. E.** : 416).

So Christine's (O'Neill's Clytemnestra) readiness for murder is due to her hatred of the Mannons' twisted Puritanism especially in the way Puritanism poisons love. Christine Mannon murders her husband because she hates him, and she hates him directly, inevitably because he is a Puritan unable to give her the love she expected from a man.

But Christine , in her "blind" love for Adam can not realize that he is using her. He wants revenge for, he, too, hates the Puritan Mannons who have destroyed his mother. Adam is a "masked"character who manipulates Christine and even Lavinia who also loves him. He helps Christine to commit the murder ( by planning it with her ) as if he could take vengeance in his own hands.

After committing the crime, and after being rejected by her children (especially by Orin , her favorite), she feels even more anguished and kills herself as a consequence of her guilty conscience. That is Christine 's *fatal flaw*, i.e., her desire to escape the Mannons'puritanism and for having dared to experience love and passion .

Christine may be likened to Clytemnestra in her adulterous relationship with Aegisthus in the three Greek tragedies mentioned above. O'Neill , in his modern version, makes Christine an anguished person, conscious of her action and able to face *fate*. Christine decides to kill Mannon in order to be released from the "burden"of her cold marriage . She poisons him, erroneously thinking this action will make her feel better but it does not (*peripety*). Unlike the Greek tragedy, it is not Lavinia (Electra) and Orin (Orestes) who kill Christine (Clytemnestra). In her anguished *guilt* (recognition) she takes her own life. After hearing from her son, Orin, that he had killed her lover (**M.B.E.**: 468), Christine can not resist this news and kills herself (**M.B.E**.: 469). All these scenes form a good example of events that excite *pity and fear and catharsis.*

Lavinia 's and Orin's *fatal flaw* is their incestuous love for their parents and later, for each other, after they adopt their mother's and father's appearances respectively. Lavinia has shown since the beginning of the play a very close attachment to her father, which even impedes her from marrying anyone:

**Lavinia** : I'm not marrying anyone, I've got my duty to my Father (**M.B.E.**:403).

The incestuous love between Lavinia and Orin is not only suggested but it is explicit in the text. One can remember Lévi- Strauss here and his view about the symbolic function of the relative relations in human beings and among these relations incest is

included. Many critics[40] have observed the important role played by the Oedipus and Electra complexes in **Mourning Becomes Electra**. Doris Alexander in her article "**Psychological Fate in Mourning Becomes Electra**" (927) says that in this play part of the family doom (*fate*) comes from O'Neill's particular treatment of theseFreudian/Jungian complexes. O'Neill's version of the Oedipus and Electra complexes differs radically from the Freudian originals. In **M.B.E.**, Doris Alexander says, "**O**'Neill uses this peculiarly non Freudian version as the force determining much of the family love and hat". As we can see in the play, all of the main characters love the parent of the opposite sex , hate the parent of the same sex , or, in the case of parents, love the child of the opposite sex, hate the child of the same sex. Adam Brant loves his mother, hates his father. His hatred of the Mannons is a regression of his attitude toward his Mannon father. Lavinia loves her father and hates her mother. Her love for her father combines with Puritanism to keep her unmarried and places her in sharp rivalry with her mother. Lavinia's jealous hatred of her mother motivates her to plan the murder of Brant, which she conceals in Puritan justification. Orin executes the murder of Brant almost exclusively as a result of his Oedipal attachment to his mother. Jealousy of his mother's lover rather than desire to avenge his father's death motivates him to kill Brant, thus driving his mother to suicide. His own suicide is the result not only of his Puritan conscience (especially after realizing later in the trilogy that he was also in love with Lavinia ), but also of his guilt and anguish at the death of his mother. So the two murders and the two suicides in **M.B.E**. are in part

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[40] For instance : Isaac Goldberg , "**Off the Margin of a copy of Electra**", **Boston Evening Transcript** , 16 Jan , 1932 , p.6 ; John Corbin , "O'Neill and Aeschylus ", **Sat Ver of Lit**, 30 April, 1932, p.695; Ivor Brown , "Mourning Becomes Electra ",**London Observer** , 21 Nov, 1937.

caused by the Oedipal loves and hates of the family. We agree with the author of the article when she says that O'Neill takes the Oedipal / Electra complexes as determining forces behind the loves and hates in the family.

Lavinia also (like Christine) tried to escape her *fate* by "becoming her mother", following her instincts and adopting a passionate way of being (but her mother failed and Lavinia, too, will fail again due to the Mannons' *curse*). After their parents' death, Lavinia and Orin go to the South Seas, to the islands of Paradise and on their return she is her mother revived, as O'Neill describes her in the introduction to scene two of the *Haunted* Section:

> Lavinia appears in the doorway at rear. In the lighted room, the change in her is strikingly apparent. At a glance, one would mistake her for her mother as she appeared in First Act of "Homecoming". She seems a mature woman, sure of her feminine attractiveness. Her brown gold hair is arranged as her mother's has been. (**M.B.E**: 487 )

Her efforts to escape her *fate* are defeated by the family Puritan conscience expressed through her brother Orin. He accuses Lavinia of being the "most criminal of all." He reveals to the audience the real truth about Lavinia and the "immoral" things she has done in the Paradise Islands. Lavinia tried to experience passion , tried to live and love without guilt, but she could not escape feeling guilty herself and she later confessed to Peter (her former fiancé) and to the the audience that "she had lusted with a native" (**M. B.E**: 517).

Since the beginning Orin loved and admired his mother passionately and later this admiration was transferred to Lavinia, who resembles his mother so much. Lavinia's

resemblance to her /his mother draws him to make this incestuous statement to her:

> **Orin**: I love you now with all the guilt in me - all the guilt we share.
> Perhaps I love you too much Vinnie (**M.B.E** :508).

Orin's guilty conscience leads him to an unbalanced state of mind . Before killing himself, he leaves a manuscript about his family's criminal history ( the family *guénos*), as a way of "exorcizing" the guilty conscience that does not fit in a Puritan mind. He reveals this very confusing state of mind to Lavinia:

> **Orin**: ... A True history of all the family crimes, beginning with grandfather's
> Abe - all of the crimes, including ours, do you understand? (**M.B.E**.: 498)

**Mourning Becomes Electra** has most of the Aristotelian characteristics of the three Greek versions of **Electra**. *Fate and fatal flaw* have already been discussed in relation to the main characters. The notion of *catharsis* is also present, but since **Mourning Becomes Electra** is a trilogy (with the three parts entitled "Homecoming", "The Hunted" and "The Haunted"), the play's cathartic effect is built slowly in a "crescendo" of tensions until the resolution.

Throughout the play one finds evidences of the Aristotelian notions of *pity and fear* (horror) provoked by the tragic scenes and situations, but the culmination horror and pity ocurring at the same time is not in the deaths and the way they occur, but rather Lavinia 's final abdication of love and return to a life of perpetual frustration within the walls of the family. She becomes an eternal "Choephoros" by burying herself alive in the Mannons' "sepulchre", as she says at the play's end:

> **Lavinia :** Don't be afraid. I'm not going the way Mother and Orin went. That's escaping punishment. And there's no one left to punish me. I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself ! Living alone here with the dead is a worse act of justice than death or prison ! I'll live alone with the dead , and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die ! I know they will see to it I live for a long time ! It takes the Mannons to punish themselves for being born! (**M.B.E.**: 518)

Lavinia's resignation and acceptance of her *fate* is what O'Neill meant by modern man's tragic action, as in tragedy man can not do anything in face of the irreparable (Steiner: 8). Lavinia is a modern protagonist; that is, she is more a victim than agent of the tragic action, like the protagonists of Greek tragedy. In this play there are no furies, but Lavinia, as well as Orin, suffers pangs of conscience. As Star Young says, "when the play ended and the last Mannon was gone into the house, the door shut, I felt in a full, lovely sense that the Erinyes were appeased, and that the Eumenides, the gentle ones, passed over the stage" (Stark Young in Gassner: 85). O'Neill's story is considered by Young a faithful "revival" of the the Atridas curse and the myth of Electra. To live and bear one's anguished and doomed existence is the "victory" of modern tragic action, the essence of modern tragedy.

When O'Neill expressed in his "Working Notes" (Barret Clark: 534) the idea of wanting to express in **M. B. E.** a "modern psychological fate", we see that this idea is finally complete when Lavinia locks herself inside the walls of her family home. Throughout the play he wished to remind us that "fate from within the family is the modern psychological approximation of the Greek conception of fate from without, from the supernatural " (Barret : 534).

What O'Neill says in relation to Greek fate is found especially in the ancient Greek tragic plays. In the three playwrights of tragedy studied in this dissertation fate is found in the Atridas "curse"- the family guénos which began with Thyestes and Atreus, and was later inherited by Agamemnon and his descendants (see the explanation of the family guénos in the part related to myths).

The effect of *pity* and *fear* is related to *catharsis*, already discussed. The audience of **Mourning Becomes Electra** can not help feeling *pity* and especially *fear* in relation to all the characters of the play. The "haunted" Mannons awake feelings of pity because they can not escape their curse. But the crimes committed by the characters, principally those committed by Lavinia also provoke *fear* in the audience as well as the sentiments of revolt and repulse. She is the one to be blamed for driving her mother to kill Mannon and later commit suicide. She is also guilty of the mental deterioration of Orin and of his suicide. But she *recognizes* her "sins" at the end of the play, as she is the only one left to bear all the punishment which the Mannons deserve. The last image in the play is that of Lavinia burying herself alive, and this scene is the very image that evokes Aristotelian *pity*; there is nothing more to be done. She is the tragic heroine who has provoked in the audience *Pity and fear* - releasing a cathartic sensation of relief for the audience. She has endured everything and has fallen with dignity.

*Peripety* and *Recognition* are also present in **Mourning Becomes Electra**. *Peripety*, or Reversal of a specific situation appears especially in the actions done by Christine. By killing her husband, she expected that things would be better, that she would be released from the burden of marriage and would be free to love Captain Brant. But the opposite happens and things became very complicated. Lavinia suspects her mother's guilt

and accuses Christine even more than does Christine 's guilty conscience. *Peripety*, in relation to Christine's fate begins exactly when she faints and the poison appears in her hands. Lavinia sees it and thus has a proof of the murder committed by her mother. Lavinia also causes her brother Orin ( who loved his mother deeply ) to turn against his mother. Another circumstamce of peripety in the play occurs when Christine meets Captain Brant after the crime, in order to warn him against the danger he is in and to make plans for their future together. Nothing turns out the way they planned, for Orin follows his mother and kills her lover - Christine's only hope for a new life.

*Recognition* in the play occurs in each character, a fact which makes the play rich and complex in its tragic action, according to Aristotle's **Poetics**. The recognition found in this trilogy corresponds to the fourth kind of recognition mentioned by Aristotle in his **Poetics** - the recognition by reasoning ( **Poetics**:46). Ezra Mannon *recognizes* the fact that he has been a cold, indifferent human being, capable only of destroying "bodies" (**M.B.E.**: 409-415) and experiencing death. He *recognizes* that he has been wrong and wants to change his life. He wants to experience life, passion and love, but it is too late. Christine also *recognizes* that she has acted wrongly by killing her husband, but her moment of "enlightenment" comes after she realizes that her lover is dead and that there is no more hope for her, only death (**M.B.E.**: 468-469). Orin's *recognition* takes place after he returns from the islands, and finds out the truth about Lavinia and about the Mannons. He *recognizes* his own truth just before he kills himself. In fact his recognition is the decisive point which makes him commit suicide (**M.B.E**: 509-510). Lavinia's **recognition** occurs at the end of the play. She *recognizes* the whole truth about herself, especially the fact that her father was her true object of desire. She also *recognizes* the whole truth about the

Mannons and accepts both the punishment and the *curse (fate)* with resignation (**M.B.E**.: 518).

O'Neill's trilogy also approximates Greek tragedy through the arrangement of the three plays in a sequence that recalls the structure of the Greek plays. And in spite of the relative weakness of the third part of O'Neill's trilogy, since there cannot be any Athena (Minerva), Areopagus or redemption ( as in the Aeschylean trilogy ), this play is an achievement on a grand scale, and of its kind, unsurpassed in 20th century- drama .

With this play O'Neill completed the circle of the "modern approximation of the Greek *fate*" that was in his mind when he wrote it ( in Barret Clark: 530 ). He shows five anguished characters trying to escape the Mannons' curse and destroying themselves in the process because the *curse/fate* (the "family *guénos*", love and hate in the family, and stern puritanism ) is larger than any of the characters' strength and endurance for a "sane survival ".

Thus having established the similarities and differences of **Mourning Becomes Electra** with the Greek versions of the myth of Electra, and having shown the Aristotelian characteristics of tragedy in the play, one can conclude that this play is a modern tragedy, especially in O' Neill 's treatment of *fate*, in the psychological development of the characters' personalities, predominantly of the personality of Lavinia in her final acceptance of the punishment destined for all the Mannons ( the same happens with the members of the Atrides family in the **Oresteia** ) . But the play is also "classic"in its parallel to the Greek versions, with its crimes and with its great emotional intensity (provoking *pity, fear and catharsis* ). The trilogy also has the Greek plays' characteristics in its plot and structure,even though it is a contemporary American tragedy.

**Conclusion :**

**Similarities and differences between Greek and Modern Tragedy: Aeschylus ' Oresteia, Sophocles' Electra and Euripides' Electra X O'Neill's Modern Tragedy Mourning Becomes Electra**

This dissertation has attempted to show that there is, in Eugene O'Neill's modern drama, the strong presence of classical / Greek characteristics. By comparing and analyzing these two forms of tragedy , the Greek and the Modern, and by establishing a debate from the beginning of this dissertation, I could conclude that O'Neill is a modern playwright who made use of characteristics of the Greek classical tragedies in his plays, and that he has purposely revived the genre of Greek tragic plays ( evidences of O'Neill's intentions are found in Bogard :394-403 and in Barret Clark: 530 ). One can affirm that his tragedies are classic in modern dress, with slight changes, (O'Neill even used the Greek devices of masks, especially in the character of Ezra Mannon ), by showing that the genre of tragedy may be adapted / subverted to a modern approach and that tragedy in O'Neill has not died (as Steiner had argued in his work **The Death of Tragedy**), but that it has been revived in a modern and contemporary genre.

Throughout the analysis of his trilogy "**Mourning Becomes Electra**" I could observe that O'Neill used Aristotle's fundamental characteristics of tragedy as found in the **Poetics**: he also adopted the Greek models of the myth of Electra (as found in Aeschylus' **Oresteia** , Sophocles'**Electra** and Euripides' **Electra**). In addition, he also applied what he knew about the Greek myths and themes relevant to both Greek and modern tragedies, the subject of this dissertation.

Modern drama as represented here by O'Neill's play **Mourning Becomes Electra** as being similar to Greek tragedy, because it is a kind of tragedy capable of arousing *pity and fear* in its audience. The heroes or "anti-heroes"of these tragedies are somehow portrayed through mythical glasses, as archetypal "haunted" figures .

One can also verify that in O'Neill's play, **Mourning Becomes Electra**, the playwright based the theme of the play on the three Greek playwrights studied in this dissertation. The trilogy comes from the Aeschylean trilogy **Oresteia**; the end is also Aeschylean as O'Neill has his Electra / Lavinia becoming an eternal "Choephoros", mourning and guarding the paternal tomb and also atoning for the sins of the Mannon family for the rest of her life( The family *Guénos - their fate )*. But the way he treats his characters, especially in the portrayal of conflicts which Lavinia, Christine and Orestes suffer throughout the play, is based on Sophocles'**Electra** as this Greek dramatist seems to understand the human heart so well and thus puts the blame of the characters' fate in their own personalities. The play is also similar to the Greeks, being especially Euripidean in the sense that the gods are questioned for giving powerful orders and commanding the destiny of mortals. O'Neill only suggests that his characters are "following a curse" but they are "free" to act and to choose their own destiny.

However, there is a remarkable difference between O'Neill and Aeschylus. Aeschylus' political and sociological concerns seem absent in O'Neill, for Aeschylus is more concerned with the problem of kingly succession and the threat of ursupation in Agamemnon's descendents (Atreus). O'Neill adopts a more personal tone: the motives of Christine's killing of her husband and of Lavinia's revenge of her father's death are based on individual motive of love and hate. But O'Neill can also be considered universal

because he deals with man's eternal quest, independent of circumstances, which is a universal theme .

Nevertheless, most critics feel that in **M.B.E.**, O'Neill simply follows Aeschylus' **Oresteia** in both character development and action, because he places the Mannon family within the context of the American Civil War (his Trojan War) in a retelling of the Orestes legend. He modernizes the Aeschylean trilogy in terms of Freud and Jung in order to produce "a modern tragic interpretation of the classic *fate*" (O'Neill in Barret Clark: 530).

In relation to the characteristics of Aristotle, to be found in the **Poetics**, one can easily identify in the O'Neillean trilogy, the use of Aristotle's norms. In the **Poetics**, *plot* is considered the most important element in tragedy and in **Mourning Becomes Electra** it is equally important. Modern tragedy also shows the common man as possessing a *fatal flaw*. It shows, as well, a cruel world offering no chance to man , who can not escape his *fate* but who must face the doomed situations of his existence with dignity.

The modern hero has been diminished in stature in comparison to the classic hero, for he no longer transgresses his own limitations as a human being. The protagonist of modern tragedy achieves meaning in protest against his own insignificance, bravely insisting that his existence has meaning, at least for himself.

The characters of modern drama have to fight constantly in order to regain, through a "sane" but difficult "quest", those things which make them human beings: their freedom, their dignity and the reality of their own being. In fact, both modern and classical tragedy raise two important questions: 1) that of human responsibility for what is called *Fate*, and 2) of what universal human truth the tragic situation illustrates. A play

which raises these questions , while at the same time telling a powerful and absorbing story can become great drama, either in classic or modern terms. O'Neill's tragedies, especially **M.B. E.**, are included in this kind of play.

Modern tragedy, like classic/ Greek tragedy, also has the capacity to excite *pity* and *fear* in the audience, thus making it experience a *catharsis*[41] of feelings and emotion. For this reason as well as others presented above, there does not seem to exist any really important differences between classic and modern tragedy.

By studying O'Neill's tragedy ( **M. B. E.** in particular) I recognized that modern tragedy may be indeed a revival of classical / Greek tragedy in modern dress, with different settings and different heroes, yet still possessing the same basic features of Greek tragedy.

Modern tragedy makes the modern theater - goer realize that there is, after all, a great deal of tragedy in real life. This tragedy is basically a product of all tragedies written throughout the centuries (a merit of "intertextuality") which started with Greek tragedy and with Aristotle's definition of tragedy in the **Poetics** as being "an imitation of an action that is serious and complete" (**Poetics**, 9 : 25).

O'Neill succeeded in recreating the Greek tragic genre in his modern drama. By using myth as a form of experimentation, by following Aristotle's notions of tragedy and by basing his characters 'portrayal on Naturalism and on Freud, Jung and Nietsche, he *got* an "approximated modern and psychological notion of the Greek idea of fate". His modern tragedies have the same intensity and transmit the same anguished feeling of the living hell that man has to endure and the forces that drive him in the modern world. One different

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[41] Even though in modern / contemporary time the feeling of "catharsis "is not guaranteed.

characteristic between the two kinds of tragedy is found in the way in which O'Neill makes the tragic characters of **Mourning Becomes Electra** expiate their sins and guilt. This expiation of the "curse/ fate" does not end with the death of the sinner, it must be expiated in a long solitary process, an example to be found in Lavinia, as she enters for the last time "the whited sepulchre"of the Mannon home, and confronts her fate in the only possible way - by accepting it. In Greek tragedy, supernatural beings such as Apollo or the goddess Athena in Orestes'trial define the character's final destiny. At the end of O'Neill's play, there is no trial and no gods will decide Lavinia's destiny; yet this ending is, by imaginative insight, Greek in spirit, as when the blinds are closed forever, the stage becomes silent, the door is shut, and the audience feels that exaltation is there, as well as completion, and the tragic certainty. Finally, the peculiar kind of suspense employed in the play is decidedly Greek and one finds, in both the Greek plays as well as in O'Neill's trilogy, as Young comments ( in Gassner: 85 ), the theme that there is something in the dead which we cannot placate.

The use of myth in O'Neill's trilogy is evident and the author makes a great effort to insure that no one misses the elaborate series of parallels that his trilogy effects. According to the critic Edgar Racey Junior, ( in Gassner: 61 ), O'Neill resorted to the use of myth which affords the artist both the necessary artistic control to explore his subject and the means of generalization. In **Mourning Becomes Electra**, O'Neill creates characters, who, by their very nature, are endowed with the necessary motivation to re-enact myth and the play contributes to a unified dramatic vision, testifying to the fact that this is the way O'Neill saw life.

By using the resources of the classic / Greek tragedy, O'Neill was able to portray man's constant sense of loss and non- belonging in the modern world, always trying to find a way out but constantly being crushed by unexplained factors that reduce his hopes for a sane existence. By this means, he placed himself in the group of American authors who have tried to find some unity among men in 20th-century multiplicity, a tradition of authors which began with Melville, Hawthorne, Adams ( in the 19th century ) and which has continued throughout 20th-century literature in authors such as Hemingway and Faulkner and later in the modern American playwrights, Miller and Williams. All seem to agree that it is difficult to fight against the material, social, psychological and spiritual forces that constantly threaten man's identity and life, placing him at the edge of extinction. That is why Greek tragedy was so important to O'Neill's modern drama, as it helped him to create and to explore his characters in the light of both ancient and modern man's eternal anguish and conflicts. Greek tragedy also helped O'Neill to understand and to make his readers / theater-goers realize that life is, in itself, a tragedy and that man is a tragic "hero" who tries to survive with dignity in a meaningless universe. This is how we see his Tragedies - Classic/ Greek but *so* Modern!

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